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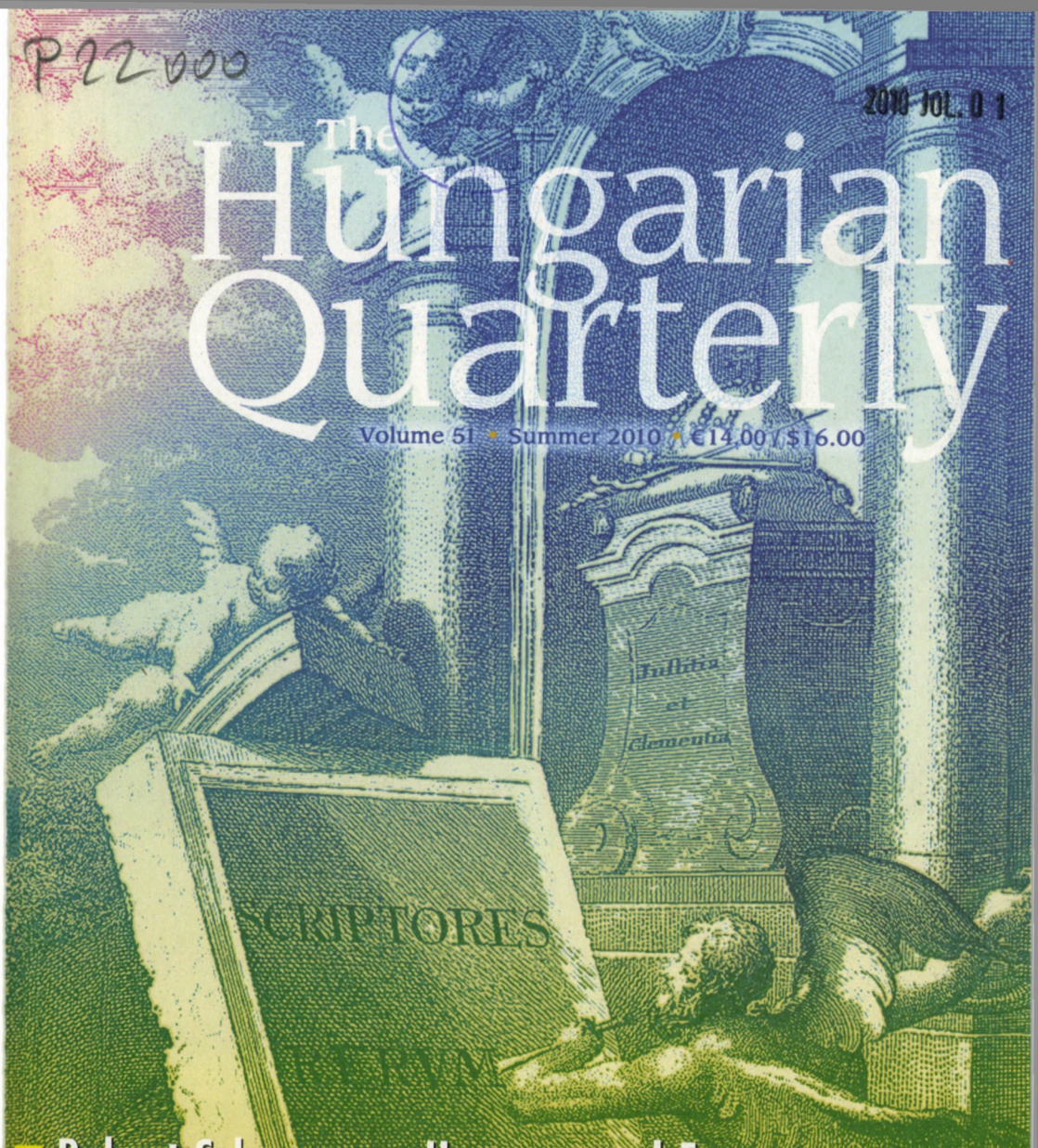

- Robert Schuman on Hungary and Europe by Graham Avery
- In the Power Arena: Foreign Policy Challenges
- Scenes from Adolescence in a Minefield. A Memoir
- Zoltán Kocsis on Schoenberg
- Dezső Ránki on Sviatoslav Richter
- Paul Griffiths on the Bartók New Series
- Ivan Sanders on Arthur Koestler
- Watercolours by Miklós Barabás
- György Gordon, a Hungarian Painter in Yorkshire

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Back cover: *Music Director Zoltán Kocsis conducting the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra. October 19, 2006, Palace of Arts, Budapest. Photograph by Zsuzsa Pető.*

Graham Avery

Robert Schuman on Hungary and Europe

Robert Schuman (1886–1963), French statesman and 'founding father' of European integration, once declared:

> *Nous devons faire l'Europe non seulement dans l'intérêt des pays libres, mais aussi pour pouvoir y accueillir les peuples de l'Est qui, délivrés des sujétions qu'elles ont subies jusqu'à présent, nous demanderont leur adhésion et notre appui moral.*
>
> We must make Europe not only in the interest of the free countries, but also to be able to welcome the peoples of the East who, freed from the subjection that they have suffered until now, will ask to join us and request our moral support. (my translation)

During the enlargement of the European Union (EU) to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which I helped to plan in the European Commission in Brussels, I often quoted this far-sighted remark of Schuman. Before 1989 he was practically the only politician in the West to predict that one day we would welcome into the EU the Europeans who were separated from us by the Iron Curtain.

But I had a problem: I could not discover the source of the quotation. It was not in Schuman's published writings, and although the secondary sources dated it to 1963, I could not find a reference to the original documentary source. This irritated me, and I even began to wonder whether the quotation was authentic. Since much of the literature concerning Schuman is hagiographic in nature, maybe one of his followers had invented it.

However, I recently discovered that the quotation was first published in 1963, just after Schuman's death, in an article dedicated to him,[1] and that in

1 ■ *France-Forum*, no. 52, November 1963.

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fact he made the remark in a speech in Luxembourg on 3 November 1956, of which I have obtained a transcript.[2]

It is clear from other remarks in the speech—whose text has not previously been published—that Schuman's appeal to Europe to "welcome the people of the East" was a response to the events in Budapest of October-November 1956, of which reports were reaching the West when he made the speech. Together with the discovery of the true date and source of the quotation, I found that Schuman had a particular interest in Hungary, beginning with visits to Budapest in the 1930s and continuing in the postwar period. So in this article[3] I will:

- describe briefly Robert Schuman's life, his visits to Hungary, and his relations with Hungarians in France
- reproduce the relevant extracts from his speech of 1956, of which only a few phrases have been published before
- conclude with some reflections on Schuman's vision of European integration.

Schuman's life

Robert Schuman was born in Luxembourg in 1886 into a family and a culture that was both German and French. His father, Jean-Pierre Schuman, was from Moselle in the French region of Lorraine, but as a result of the transfer of Lorraine to Germany in 1871 he became a German citizen; after settling in Luxembourg, he married a Luxembourg woman, who consequently became German, and their son Robert, born in Luxembourg, also had German nationality according to the principle of *jus sanguinis*.

Although his mother tongue was Letzbuergisch, the language of Luxembourg and neighbouring regions, Robert Schuman was also fluent in German and French. After studying law at the universities of Bonn, Munich, Berlin and Strasbourg, he began a legal practice in Metz in Lorraine, which was then part of the German Reich. Recruited into the German army in the Great War, he was seconded into the civil service. After the war Lorraine was transferred to France in 1918, so Schuman became a French citizen, and in 1919 he was elected to the French Parliament as a representative of Moselle.

In political life Schuman was a member of parties of the Christian Democrat family, and from his early days was a militant social Catholic. He probably

2 ■ I am indebted to David Price, director of the Schuman Project (http://www.schuman.info), for informing me of this document and for kindly making a copy available to me.

3 ■ In the preparation of this article I am grateful for advice, comments and encouragement received from László Bruszt, Professor at the European University Institute; Györgyi Kocsis, Deputy Editor-in-chief of the political and economic weekly *HVG*; Jean-Marie Palayret, Director of the Historical Archives of the European Union; Jean-Marie Majerus, Robert Schuman Centre for European Studies and Research (CERE); David Price, Director of the Schuman Project; János Rainer, Director of the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution; Zsófia Zachár, Editor of *The Hungarian Quarterly*.

considered the possibility of becoming a priest; he never married, and was involved in many Roman Catholic causes. However, his actions and writings show no trace of the anti-Semitism that was common in Catholic circles. Since his death, the procedure has begun in Rome for his beatification.

As a parliamentarian in the 1920s and 1930s Schuman was active in the politics of Alsace-Lorraine, and with his international background he naturally became interested in foreign affairs. He travelled in Central Europe, visiting Germany and countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, including Hungary in 1930, 1934 and 1935.

In 1940, after the outbreak of the Second World War, he was appointed to a junior post in the French government, but resigned at the time of the Armistice, and on his return to Metz was arrested by the Gestapo because he refused to collaborate with the new regime.[4] He was put under house arrest in Germany, but after escaping in 1942 he remained in hiding in various places in France for the rest of the war.

After the war he was elected again to the French Parliament, serving as a representative of Moselle from 1945 to 1962. During the period from 1946 to 1955 he was a member of several French governments, as finance minister, prime minister, foreign minister and justice minister. Later he was the first president of the European Parliament and president of the European Movement.

Already before the war Schuman had developed ideas for new European structures and for the reconciliation of the peoples of Europe, which he put into action after 1945. The French government of which he was a member launched plans for what became the Council of Europe and the Convention of Human Rights.

In an important speech on 9 May 1950, as foreign minister and with the approval of the French government, he launched the Schuman Plan. This proposed the creation of a supranational Community for coal and steel, with a High Authority based on a new type of European legal order. Schuman had already outlined in speeches his ideas for European integration, but they were opposed by other politicians—nationalists, Gaullists and Communists—and by officials in the Foreign Ministry. To avoid the plan being sabotaged, the text of Schuman's declaration was drafted secretly by trusted colleagues in the Foreign Ministry, with the aid of Jean Monnet, head of the French planning bureau.

Schuman's initiative led to the European Coal and Steel Community being created by the Treaty of Paris in 1951; this was the precursor of the European Economic Community created by the Treaty of Brussels in 1956, and later of the European Union created by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. Schuman is

4 ■ François Roth, *Robert Schuman. Du Lorrain des frontières au père de l'Europe.* Paris: Fayard, 2008, p. 235.

thus considered to be one of the 'founding fathers' of the European Union, and the 'Europe Day' celebrated in many countries on 9 May commemorates his 1950 declaration.

Although Robert Schuman held high office in France, he was more honoured abroad than at home; in the eyes of French Gaullists he was too German, and he was also criticized for being too Catholic and too austere. He was in fact a true internationalist, both by experience and by conviction, and his speeches and writings on European integration have had a lasting influence.

Schuman's visits to Hungary

In August 1930 Schuman took part in a visit to Budapest organized for a 'Groupe d'études de l'Europe centrale' (Study Group for Central Europe) of French parliamentarians.[5] Its leader was Abbé Bergey, a Catholic priest and member of the French parliament, who had already organized visits to Hungary and sympathized with the 'National Christian' ideas prevalent in Magyar circles, as did many Catholic conservatives in France. In Budapest Schuman and Bergey stayed—as they requested—in a seminary rather than a hotel.

The official purpose of the visit was to attend ceremonies for the 900th anniversary of Saint Imre (Emerich), son of Saint István (King Stephen), but it also responded to the Hungarian government's wish for better links with French political circles. The government paid part of the cost of the visit, provided the services of a guide to accompany the visitors, and arranged for them to meet the President of the Parliament, Foreign Minister Lajos Walkó and Social Affairs Minister József Vass.

Although the visit from 16 to 22 August was brief, it seems to have had a considerable influence on Schuman's thinking. The situation in Central Europe was not well understood in France at that time, but Schuman was one of those who realized that the economic crisis threatened the chances of peace, and that the growing power of Germany required a change in French foreign policy towards the countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which had been 'losers' of the First World War. The idea was for France to develop a counterweight to the power of Germany by improving its relations with Austria and Hungary, to encourage cooperation among the states of the Danube Basin, and even to bring back in some way the Catholic Habsburg monarchy.

Four years later in May 1934 Schuman visited Vienna and Budapest with a group of politicians and journalists led by the French parliamentarian Xavier Vallat, who hoped to develop an alliance between France, Italy and the Central Europeans

5 ■ This section concerning Schuman's visits to Hungary draws largely on Gergely Fejérdy's important article "Une relation oubliée: Robert Schuman et la Hongrie." *European Issues,* no. 194, Paris: Fondation Robert Schuman, 2005.

in order to inflect the policies of the Third Reich following Hitler's rise to power. The visit to Hungary was made at the invitation of the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap,* and its aim was to show the visitors the country's political and economic situation. Their tour included not only the capital but also Esztergom and Bábolna.

During their visit they were received by Regent Miklós Horthy, Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös and President of the Parliament László Almássy. Among other public figures whom they met were the Primate of Hungary Jusztinián Serédi, Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya, Minister of Education Bálint Hóman, Kálmán Darányi (who became Prime Minister in 1936), Pál Teleki (who became Prime Minister in 1939) and Andor Lázár.

One of the group's visits was to the Kisgazdapárt (Smallholders' Party) whose chairman was Tibor Eckhardt, Hungary's High Commissioner at the League of Nations. During a visit to the Nemzeti Radikális Párt (National Radical Party) Schuman switched at a certain moment from French to German to facilitate the conversation, which evidently irritated the group's host Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, who was a Germanophobe. Seeing this, Schuman remarked "Gentlemen, if the German language doesn't worry me, it shouldn't be a problem for you."

This visit to Hungary, and another which he made to Yugoslavia in August 1934, seems to have reinforced Schuman's belief that French policy should be directed towards a rapprochement with Austria and Hungary in order to restrain German expansionism. From his origins in Lorraine, Schuman understood well the problems of minorities with which many of the Central European countries were struggling and the difficulties caused by the frontier adjustments which Hungary and its neighbours had experienced.

In September 1935 Schuman visited Hungary again with another group of French parliamentarians and journalists, invited to study the economic situation by *Pesti Hírlap* together with Magyar Gyáriparosok Országos Szövetsége (Hungarian National Association of Industrialists) and Magyar Gazdasági Egyesület (Hungaria National Association of Economists). They were received by Regent Miklós Horthy at his residence at Gödöllő, and by members of the government including Finance Minister Tihamér Fabinyi. During their visit, which lasted from 13 to 20 September, they were also taken to the village of Röszke to see the problems caused by frontier changes. After leaving Hungary they returned to France via Vienna, where they met Chancellor Schuschnigg.

Schuman's contacts with Hungarians in France

During the period after the Second War when he held government office in Paris, and particularly when he was Foreign Minister in 1948–53, Robert Schuman had further contacts with Hungarians. His acquaintance with Pál Auer was probably significant for the development of his views not only on Hungary, but also on Europe.

Auer, who since 1924 had been a member of the Pan Europa movement founded by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, was legal adviser at the French Embassy in Budapest before the Second War and Hungary's first minister in Paris after it. In 1947 when Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy was forced to leave Hungary, Auer was one of the diplomats who resigned, and he stayed in France where he became an active member of the Hungarian émigré community and was a correspondent of Schuman. From 1948 he was a member of the Board of Magyar Nemzeti Bizottmány (Hungarian National Committee) of which Schuman knew several other members as a result of his visits to Hungary. Auer founded in 1949 Magyar Európa Tanács (Hungarian Council for Europe) and later Közép- és Kelet-Európai Bizottság (Committee for Central and Eastern Europe) to which Schuman was invited to speak. In 1955 Schuman also became a member of the Comité France-Hongrie founded by Pál Auer and Jules Romains with the aim of pursuing cultural relations between the two countries.

Auer was succeeded as minister in Paris by Count Mihály Károlyi, known as the 'Red Count'. At a meeting in 1949 with Henry Gauquié, French minister in Budapest, who was then in Paris, Károlyi complained that he had not yet succeeded in obtaining a meeting with Robert Schuman, who had been appointed foreign minister four months previously, and he asked Gauquié to intervene on his behalf. Károlyi reported that during this conversation Gauquié remarked ironically concerning Schuman *"Qu'est-ce que vous voulez que je fasse avec un homme qui prie tout le temps?"* (What can one do with a man who prays all the time?).

Nevertheless, as a result of this meeting, Schuman received Károlyi two days later and treated him courteously. As a fervent Catholic, Schuman had been shocked by the treatment of the Church in Hungary; after the arrest and trial of Cardinal Mindszenty in 1949 he expressed his disapproval in a statement to the press. Later, in 1949, Schuman accepted a courtesy visit from the new Hungarian minister in Paris, Zoltán Szántó, who was one of the founders of the Hungarian Communist Party supported by Moscow.

Schuman's speech of 3 November 1956

I come now to the speech made by Robert Schuman in Luxembourg on 3 November 1956 in which he appealed to his audience to "welcome the people of the East". At the time, Schuman was no longer a minister but still a member of the French Parliament. Luxembourg was not only his native place but also the seat of the institutions of the European Coal and Steel Community including its High Authority,[6] although its Assembly[7] was based in Strasbourg.

6 ■ The High Authority was the precursor of the European Commission, which is now located in Brussels.
7 ■ The Assembly was the precursor of the European Parliament, which is still based in Strasbourg.

The speech was given at a dinner of the Luxembourg Rotary Club, which took place at the Casino and was attended by many important figures, including the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Joseph Bech, four ministers of the Luxembourg government, several members of the European Coal and Steel Community's High Authority, the Grand Marshal of the Court (representing Luxembourg's Grand Duke), the ambassadors of France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the USA, as well as members of Rotary Clubs from neighbouring cities in France and Belgium. The theme of the event and of Schuman's speech was *"L'intégration européenne est-elle un objectif valable et d'actualité?"* (Is European integration a valid aim at the present time?)[8]

In his speech[9] Schuman begins by asserting that despite current difficulties Europe is still on the agenda and is relevant to contemporary political problems. He refers to the situation in different parts of the world where "Europe is being attacked", mentioning particularly the Middle East, Suez, Asia and Africa, where attacks are being made on French interests and on Europeans living in the former colonies. The French government, he says, wants to launch a European programme of aid for these countries and for Europe itself. He continues:[10]

> *Notre solidarité devra jouer en faveur des régions, de toutes les régions sous-développées en Europe d'abord—et il y en a—puis dans les régions que les nations européennes ont prises en charge. En deuxième ligne, ce qui fait l'actualité du problème européen, c'est la nécessité de concentrer nos ressources et nos énergies sur le plan économique d'abord. Inutile de vous en parler longuement. Les entreprises doivent être modernisées, doivent se spécialiser, les investissements doivent être plus rationnés, il faut mettre en commun les matières premières, la main d'œuvre, les capitaux, les inventions, les progrès techniques. Tout ceci suppose une organisation européenne. Dans le domaine politique, il y a les blocs de puissance qui se sont créés, les anciens: les États-Unis d'Amérique, Commonwealth Britannique, les nouveaux: le bloc soviétique (qui aujourd'hui subit certains ébranlements dont nous ne pourrons pas encore à l'heure actuelle mesurer la portée, nous ne savons pas si, ce qui est mis en cause, est la doctrine ou simplement la discipline), nous avons des ensembles*

8 ■ The text of Schuman's speech and the introductory and concluding speeches of the chairman of the event, Albert Wehrer, are recorded in a typewritten report of 17 pages, apparently made by the Luxembourg Rotary Club. My copy of the document bears the stamp 'Hohe Behörde Bibliothek' (Library of the High Authority) with the number 7736 and the date stamp 10 Dec 1956. The report appears to have been compiled on the basis of notes or a tape recording made at the dinner, since —as indicated in the notes below—some passages in the typescript represent (or mis-represent) spoken words. Probably Schuman used written notes for his speech, and added remarks extempore as he spoke.

9 ■ I reproduce here not the full speech (12 pages of typescript) which concerns mainly the challenges facing the six members of the Community at the time, but two sections (equivalent to about 2 pages of typescript) in which he refers to Eastern Europe.

10 ■ Page 6 of the typescript.

comme la Chine, l'Inde, ensembles techniques et culturels. Nous avons la Ligue Arabe dont je vous ai parlé tout à l'heure. L'Europe seule est déchirée, désunie, malgré ses affinités réelles et profondes, et c'est là, Messieurs, le véritable scandale de l'heure actuelle. Ce rôle de l'Europe, loin d'être achevé, se renouvelle. Il nous faut l'Europe à l'égard des territoires d'Outre-Mer, j'en dirai un mot tout à l'heure, je l'ai dit tout à l'heure, à l'égard aussi des peuples de l'Est qui aujourd'hui s'affranchissent. L'Europe doit se sauver et se maintenir non seulement pour elle-même, mais pour le monde qui a besoin d'elle plus que jamais. Aucune diversion, aucune de nos difficultés ne nous en dispense. Au contraire, toute difficulté nouvelle fait apparaître davantage encore cet impérieux devoir.

Translation:

We must show our solidarity in helping the regions, beginning with all the underdeveloped regions of Europe—and there are plenty of them—and then the regions for which the European nations have taken responsibility. In the second place, and this is what makes the European question topical, we need to concentrate our resources and our energy above all on the economic level. I don't need to talk to you at length about this. Firms need to be modernized, to specialize, investments need to be rationed, we need to pool raw materials, the workforce, capital, inventions, technical progress. All this requires Europe to organize itself. In the field of politics, power blocs have been created: old ones, like the United States of America and the British Commonwealth, and new ones like the Soviet bloc (which today is undergoing disruption whose extent we cannot measure at the present time; we do not know if what is being challenged is doctrine or simply discipline), we have entities like China and India, technical and cultural entities, and we have the Arab League, which I mentioned earlier. Europe alone is divided and disunited, despite its real and deep affinities, and that, gentlemen, is the true scandal of our time. Europe's role, far from being finished, is renewed. We need Europe for the overseas territories—I will say a word about them in a moment—and as I said a moment ago, we need it also for the peoples of the East who today are freeing themselves. Europe must preserve and maintain itself not only for its own sake, but for the world which needs it more than ever. No diversions, none of our difficulties, can absolve us from this. On the contrary, every new difficulty highlights further our compelling duty.

Schuman goes on to explain what he means by European integration. One of its requirements is the possibility for authority to be exercised without unanimous agreement, for decisions of the majority to be binding on the minority, as is the case in democracies. Reviewing the experience of international organizations he argues that after deliberation you need to take decisions, and comments that in the European Coal and Steel Community the mere fact that a decision of the Authority is possible incites the member

states to reach agreement. *"Il suffit d'avoir le pouvoir pour n'avoir pas à s'en server"* (It's enough to have the power for its use not to be necessary).

The major part of the speech is devoted to the ideas under discussion at the time among the Six for the creation of the common market (European Economic Community) and Euratom (European Atomic Energy Community). He explains that with the common market there will be a single market for the six member countries, in the same way as for a single country without internal frontiers. This will involve the free movement not only of goods but also of services, labour and capital. The purpose of the common market will be to improve living standards, and it will need to be regulated. National economic policies will have to be coordinated, and currencies will need to be unified or at least made convertible. He admits that France, with its tradition of protectionism, lags behind its partners in explaining to the public the benefits which the common market can bring. Lessons can be learned for the Six from cooperation between the three Benelux countries.

Schuman concludes his speech:[11]

> *L'Europe n'est pas une chose simple, parce qu'elle n'est pas une vue de l'esprit que chacun peut construire à sa façon, elle est une entreprise qui exige en dehors de toute technicité éprouvée, la confiance que la nation a en elle-même et la confiance qu'elle place dans la bonne foi de ses partenaires. Messieurs, j'ai parlé longtemps de technique et je m'en excuse. Après un repas en Luxembourg, c'est un grand effort. Mais j'ai voulu ce soir, aussi brièvement que possible vous faire les confidences de nos préoccupations, de notre volonté à la fois de réussir avec les autres partenaires, mais aussi de mettre de notre côté les meilleures chances. Mais vous ne me comprendriez si, avant de terminer, je n'insisterais pas sur un nouvel aspect du problème européen. Nous devons faire l'Europe non seulement dans l'intérêt des pays libres, mais aussi pour pouvoir y accueillir les peuples de l'Est qui, délivrés des sujétions[12] qu'elles ont subies jusqu'à présent, nous demanderont[13] leur adhésion et notre appui moral. Depuis de longues années, nous avons douloureusement ressenti la ligne de démarcation idéologique qui coupe l'Europe en deux. Elle était imposée par la violence, maintenue par la force, avec effort. Puisse-t-elle s'effacer dans la liberté. Nous considérons comme partie intégrante de l'Europe, de l'Europe vivante, tous ceux qui ont le désir de nous rejoindre dans une communauté reconstituée. Nous rendons*

11 ■ Pages 14–15 of the typescript.

12 ■ The typescript reads 'suggestions' which in this context cannot be correct, but is easily explicable by the fact that in spoken French the words 'suggestions' and 'sujétions' sound similar; presumably the person who transcribed the speech (perhaps from a tape recording) chose the more familiar word 'suggestions'.

13 ■ The typescript reads 'demanderons' which is grammatically incorrect (first person plural instead of third person plural). As in the preceding case, the error is easily explained since the French words 'demanderons' and 'demanderont' are pronounced identically. The text as published in *France-Forum* in 1963 read 'demanderaient' but in my view 'demanderont' is more appropriate here.

hommage à leur courage, à leur fidélité, comme à leur souffrance et à leurs sacrifices. Nous leur devons l'exemple d'une Europe Unie et fraternelle. Chaque pas que nous faisons dans ce sens constituera pour eux une chance nouvelle. Ils ont besoin de nous dans l'immense tâche de réadaptation qu'ils auront à accomplir. La Communauté Européenne doit créer l'ambiance pour une compréhension mutuelle dans le respect des particularités de chacun, elle sera la base solide d'une coopération féconde et pacifique. Ainsi s'édifiera une Europe nouvelle, prospère et indépendante. Messieurs, notre devoir est d'être prêt.

Translation:

> Europe is not something simple, because it's not a way of thinking that you can make up just as you like, it's an enterprise that requires not only tested technical expertise but also the confidence that a nation has in itself and in the good faith of its partners. Gentlemen, I'm sorry, I have talked for a long time about technical matters, and that's a big effort after a meal in Luxembourg. But this evening I wanted to share with you, as briefly as I could, our concerns and our wish to succeed with the other partners and to give ourselves the best chance of success. But you would not understand if, before concluding, I did not underline a new aspect of the European problem. We must make Europe not only in the interests of the free countries, but also to be able to welcome the peoples of the East who, freed from the subjection that they have suffered until now, will ask to join us and request our moral support. For many years we have been painfully conscious of the ideological demarcation line that cuts Europe in two. It was imposed by violence, and maintained—with an effort—by force. Let it disappear in freedom! We consider all those who wish to join us in our renewed community to be an integral part of Europe, the living Europe. We salute their courage, their fidelity, as well as their suffering and their sacrifices. We owe them the example of a united and fraternal Europe. Each step we take in this direction will be a new opportunity for them. They need us in the immense task of adaptation that they will need to complete. The European Community must create the atmosphere for mutual understanding, while respecting each one's individual characteristics, and provide a solid basis for fruitful and peaceful cooperation. In this way a new, prosperous and independent Europe will be built. Gentlemen, our duty is to be ready.

What can we deduce from this speech? Although Schuman does not refer to Hungary explicitly, his reference to "the Soviet bloc undergoing disruption" must surely allude to the events which had been taking place in Budapest in the preceding days. His parenthetical remark that "we cannot measure the extent of this disruption at the present time; we do not know if what is being challenged is doctrine or simply discipline" reveals that Schuman was concerned by the implications of the Hungarian uprising, but—like others in the West—did not yet understand what was really happening. The way in which this remark is

introduced, as a digression from Schuman's main theme, suggests that it was added at the last moment in response to the news coming from Budapest.

After returning to the theme of European integration, he reverts implicitly to Hungary with his remark about "needing Europe... for the peoples of the East who today are freeing themselves."

Finally in his conclusion, after apologizing for the length of the speech, he speaks again of the events taking place in Hungary, and in a passionate exordium denounces the subjection of the peoples of Eastern Europe and salutes their "courage, fidelity, suffering and sacrifices". Concerning the demarcation line that divides Europe, his exhortation "Let it disappear in freedom!" strikes us now as a forerunner of later declarations about the Berlin Wall. We can see now that Schuman's appeal to "welcome the peoples of the East", his prediction that when "freed from subjection, they will ask to join us" and his call to "consider all those who wish to join us... to be an integral part of Europe" were extraordinarily prescient. With these words Schuman effectively forecast the situation which came about more than 30 years later when the Iron Curtain finally disappeared.

This concluding passage of the speech, departing from its main themes of European integration and the common market, was no doubt also an addition. One may suppose that the principal materials of the speech were prepared by Schuman in advance, with the aid of his preceding speeches, but the concluding section, referring to a "new aspect" of the European problem, was added at the last moment in response to the events in Hungary.

It is noticeable that nowhere in these passages does Schuman refer by name to Hungary or to communism, and his reference to the "Soviet bloc" occurs only in the sober part of the speech, not in its passionate conclusion. Although the allusions are rather clear, he refrains from making them explicit. This was presumably the result of his experience in the field of diplomacy, where foreign ministers prefer to be discreet and to make verbal attacks under cover of vagueness.

His reference to "the peoples of the East" shows that he viewed Hungary not as an isolated case but as indicative of other countries under Communist rule. In Poland riots had taken place in Poznań in June 1956, and when the Polish Communist Party elected the liberal-national Władysław Gomułka as its First Secretary on 19 October 1956, Soviet troop manoeuvres began at the Polish border; however, as a result of Gomułka's assurance that domestic reforms would not lead to Poland abandoning communism or its treaties with the Soviet Union, no military intervention took place. After information about the Polish events reached Hungary, it was a student demonstration in support of Gomułka that sparked the uprising in Budapest in the last week of October.

We do not know exactly what information Schuman received in the days before his speech about the events which had taken place in Budapest. It is reasonable to suppose that his main source of information was the French press, since he

was no longer a member of the French government. The information reaching the West was extremely confusing, with the demonstration in Budapest on 23 October, Soviet tanks entering the city on 24 October, Imre Nagy replacing András Hegedűs as Prime Minister, the announcement of the retreat of Soviet troops, and then Nagy's appeal to the United Nations on 1 November. After Schuman's speech on 3 November, Soviet tanks re-entered Budapest on 4 November and were met by the resistance that continued until 10 November.

Having examined the speech, let us look at the political context in the West at the time when it was made.

Concerning Schuman's remarks about the common market, we may note that negotiations were under way in 1956 for a European Economic Community that would create a new framework for European integration with a wider scope than the Coal and Steel Community which had existed since the Treaty of Paris in 1951. An intergovernmental conference of the six member states, which had begun at Val Duchesse in Brussels in June 1956, led to the signing of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957.

Concerning Hungary, the speech was made at a moment when the public in Western Europe was aware of the uprising in Budapest and the Soviet intervention, but many in Hungary and elsewhere believed that order had been restored. The shocking images in the Western press of tanks in the streets[14] provoked a wave of sympathy for the Hungarian people, but at the same time the explanation propagated by Moscow that it was helping the Hungarian government to suppress a counter-revolution organized by fascist reactionaries was widely reported. As we have seen, this version was not accepted by Schuman, but it was endorsed by the French Communist Party, the country's largest left-wing party; in a confused debate that took place in the National Assembly in Paris on 7 November many members were critical of the Hungarian uprising and of the French government's support for moves at the United Nations to condemn the Soviet intervention.

The international position of the French government was handicapped by the fact that it was itself conducting an invasion in another part of the world. Following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in July 1956, a secret plan for invasion had been formed by the governments of France and Britain; the bombing of Egypt commenced on 31 October, and the country was entered by British paratroops on 5 November and by French forces on the next day. In his speech in Luxembourg on 3 November Schuman referred, as we have seen, to Suez as one of the regions of the world where Europe and the interests of France were being 'attacked', but he made no mention of the Franco-British intervention that had begun in the preceding days.

14 ■ I myself remember seeing in the British press at the time the images of tanks in the streets of Budapest; as a schoolboy of 13, I understood nothing of the situation, but I recall those press reports as one of my first encounters with international affairs.

Schuman's vision of European integration

After retiring from politics Robert Schuman published in 1963 the book *Pour l'Europe*[15] in which he set out his reflections on European integration. This, the only book that he published, is a distillation of ideas and themes from the notes, articles and speeches which he had previously made on European affairs.

It is also a testament, concluding with a passionate appeal: *"L'Europe se cherche; elle sait qu'elle a en ses mains son propre avenir. Jamais elle n'a été si près du but. Dieu fasse qu'elle ne laisse pas passer l'heure de son destin, l'ultime chance de son salut."*[16] (Europe is seeking itself, it knows that it has its future in its hands. Never has it been so close to the goal. May God ensure that it does not let pass its hour of destiny, its last chance of salvation.)

Although the book touches on several of the themes mentioned in Schuman's speech of November 1956, such as the need for majority voting, the arguments for a common market, and the lessons to be learned from the European Coal and Steel Community, the Luxembourg speech is not quoted and does not seem to have been a direct source for the text of 1963.

Many passages in the book are of historical interest, such as the analysis of Franco–German relations and the factors which led to the Second World War. Schuman writes as a French citizen and statesman, but with a deep understanding of Germany as a result of his origins in Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg. Referring to himself as "a man of the frontier" he argues for a reduction in the importance of frontiers—not their removal, since one cannot rewrite history, but less rigidity so that they become zones of contact rather than barriers between countries. Many themes of the book remain pertinent today, and among them I select for mention two passages which continue to have salience.

Firstly, despite his critique of nationalism (which, he explains, is not the same as patriotism) and notwithstanding his arguments for a supranational authority, Schuman insists on the role of nations and states. *"Il ne s'agit pas de fusionner les états, de créer un super Etat. Nos états européens sont une réalité historique; il serait psychologiquement impossible de les faire disparaître. Leur diversité est même très heureuse, et nous ne voulons ni les niveler ni les égaliser."*[17] (It's not a question of merging states or of creating a super-state. Our states in Europe are a historical reality; it would be psychologically impossible to make them disappear. In fact their diversity is a good thing, and we do not wish to level them or make them the same.)

Secondly, although he was a man of broad ideas and vision, Schuman understood from his experience in politics that the construction of Europe

15 ■ Paris: Les Editions Nagel, 1963. Lajos Nágel, originally a bookseller and publisher in Budapest, emigrated during the Second War to France where he founded a publishing house.
16 ■ Ibid, p. 196.
17 ■ Ibid, p. 24.

required a gradual and practical approach. *"L'Europe ne se fera pas d'un coup, ni dans une construction d'ensemble: elle se fera par des réalisations concrètes, créant d'abord une solidarité de fait."*[18] (Europe will not be made at one go, nor in an overall construction: it will be made through concrete achievements that create real solidarity.)

The book ranges widely over questions of foreign affairs, but makes no mention of Hungary and few references to Eastern Europe. In fact the first reference to communism in the text is a denunciation of the "so-called popular democracies" for refusing to recognize the Church.[19] However, in an important passage on the Cold War[20] Schuman notes that both Europe and Germany are divided because of the West's disagreement with Russia, and he speculates—without optimism—on the chances of ending it. One possibility, he writes, would be an urgent desire for *détente* on the part of the peoples under the Soviet regime, leading to the recognition of a common interest in reconstruction and a suspension of the revolutionary ideals of Marxism. He discusses the possibility of the reunification of Germany through free elections, remarking that this could be done in such a way that Russia and its satellites would obtain guarantees against the risk of it returning to hegemony. He argues that a satisfactory conclusion could be found to the problem of Germany, and implicitly to the problem of Europe, by creating a wide community accessible to all, in a spirit of peaceful cooperation.

Although this passage expresses Schuman's hope, mentioned already in his speech of 1956, that the reunification of Europe would result from pressure for change by the peoples under communism, it seems that when he published the book in 1963 he was not expecting it to happen soon. Nevertheless, the passage shows that he maintained his vision of a community accessible to all Europeans. Thus he foresaw, many years in advance, the enlargement of the European Union, which brought Hungary and its neighbours into the European community in 2004 and 2007.

As a friend of Hungary, Schuman would, I think, have appreciated the fact that the remarks which he made in 1956 in response to the uprising in Budapest are now published in a Hungarian journal, and that its publication takes place as Hungary prepares to assume for the first time the Presidency of the European Union's Council of Ministers. During the first half of 2011, when Ministers from Budapest preside meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg that decide common policies for the EU's 27 member states, Hungary will indeed, as Schuman foresaw, be functioning as "an integral part of Europe, the living Europe". ❧

18 ■ Ibid, p. 201 (this passage is from Schuman's Declaration of 9 May 1950).
19 ■ Ibid, p. 74.
20 ■ Ibid, p. 187–192.

László Darvasi

Wulfenia Carinthiaca

Excerpt from the novel *Petal Gobblers*

The officer's name was Vogel, and he remembered having seen the Hungarian man a couple of years earlier in an inn sitting at a table with a grubby Gypsy, heads close together, deep in conversation. The officer had worked his way up through the ranks, from lowly private to the privileged post of interrogator, he had made it to the rank of inspector shortly after the victory, and had every reason to bear a grudge against Hungarians. At the very beginning of the rebellion his brother, Little Vogel, had been killed in a minor skirmish near Lake Balaton. His brother had had a stutter, had been short, slight of build, and sickly, and he, Big Vogel, could not understand why, why his brother had been chosen to be sent into the line of fire when he could have been assigned safe paperwork instead. The boy had had neat, legible handwriting and he had been good at drawing, he would have made an excellent military engineer; instead he had been driven to his death, shot by the rebel curs, and for this Vogel resented his own side as well. On his darkest days he hated the entire world, and would spit at his own reflection in the mirror.

He had been staring into the Hungarian's pinched, drawn face for some minutes; the man was clearly on edge, the hand resting on the table was trembling, and in his eyes, how well Vogel knew that look, the candle-flame of terror flickered. This man would not give him any trouble. Spit at his feet and he'd be babbling like a brook. Hah, a blade of grass! The idiot had been delivering a lecture on a blade of grass just before the murder! The witnesses had already given their statements. Gardens, blades of grass, people! Every

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László Darvasi

has published short story collections, children's books and two novels, as well as several volumes of feuilletons, the latter under the name of Ernő Szív. Six of his books have been translated into German and published under the imprint of Suhrkamp and Rowohlt. The above excerpt is taken from his latest novel, Virágzabálók *(Petal Gobblers, 2009), to be published in German by Suhrkamp. It is reviewed on pp. 146–52 of this issue.*

word had been taken down. The whole lecture had been riddled with metaphor, a coded message! Inspector Bischof himself had granted permission to hold the lecture at the casino. The oak chair skidded back with a loud crack as he jumped to his feet. He flung the door open with a brisk impetuous gesture, the corridor was empty. From beyond the corner the shadow cast by one of the guards spread across the floor, torches flamed in sconces along the walls. Vogel shut his eyes, the cool draught felt good on his face. He slammed the door shut and began the interrogation. He spoke in German, he knew the Hungarian spoke his mother tongue fluently.

Name?

Imre Szép.

Occupation?

Let's say...botanist.

And if we don't say?

Plants are my profession. The study of flowers, he shrugged. He smiled wryly. I'm a member of the Academy.

Do you know why you're here?

I do, he nodded.

Vogel was surprised; had he just extracted a confession in the case of the death of Karl Bischof, imperial and royal inspector? Vogel had always had tremendous respect for the inspector, he had admired his imperturbability and self-confidence, and had been so enraged by the news of the foul murder that he had thrown up his breakfast. He was driven now by a thirst for vengeance, but he tried to control himself, he knew he must not give in to his passions, this mysterious affair demanded a clear head and logical thinking, it is what Inspector Bischof would have wanted, expected of him. He had been examining the cracks in the wall, but now he turned to face the Hungarian, even leaned forward a little.

Well, why are you here, sir?

I could begin anywhere, replied Imre in a soft voice.

As you please, said Vogel, sitting down.

Excuse me, sir, where are you from? Imre unexpectedly asked. I mean, where were you born?

Vogel was so surprised at the question that he replied without thinking, I was born in Feldbach, he said, and suddenly he felt so ashamed that his face turned bright red.

Imre nodded, and began to speak.

Then I shall begin with the Noricum Alps, he mused, and as Vogel simply stared back at him he continued, I don't know if you've ever heard of Wulfenia Carinthiaca, which grows in the Noricum Alps. It is an especially beautiful flower. I've seen it myself, in its natural habitat. Have you ever had the privilege of seeing this rare flower?

Vogel just shook his head, he did not speak.

In the Noricum Alps, Imre continued, in what is known as Styria today, glacial ice-flows shaped the contours of the mountain ranges. But the so-called diluvian ice-flows slid down to a certain stretch of the Drau and Mur valleys, and where they could not carve and scallop the huge mounds of earth, they left widely sprawling, gently sloping downs covered by dense forests or alpine meadows to this day. Yes, Styria is beautiful, you should be proud of your birthplace, sir. The climate is Mediterranean, there are blue tarns in the valleys, the rivers are fast-flowing and cool even in the heat of summer. The forests are mixed, mostly oaks, beeches and firs, but there are linden trees, maples, medlars, chestnuts and wild pear trees as well. Feldbach is a famous garden city, that is a well-known fact, and it is one of the natural habitats of Wulfenia Carinthiaca. Is that not so, Herr Vogel?

Vogel still had not said a word, but he was looking grimmer by the minute.

Wulfenia Carinthiaca is a very rare plant, and can only be found in your birthplace, in the Hermagor area, and on the Albanian–Serbian border. You should be proud, sir, of the flower named Wulfenia Carinthiaca. Naturally, the marshy, lower-lying lands of your birthplace are home to other plants as well, such as sword-flags, Turk's caps, orchids and marsh sword-grass. These flowers are spectacular too. You are a very lucky man.

It was a rebellion, that is perfectly clear, said Vogel softly; he stood up, the floorboards creaked beneath his feet. Your lot has forfeited its rights, Schön. The Hungarian aristocracy has degenerated, it fears and hates Vienna, your Catholic priests have sided with the rebels, your gentry is resourceless, your bourgeoisie pathetic. That is what I am talking about, Schön. And what are you talking about?

Flowers, he said, nodding, I am talking about flowers.

And why are you talking to me about flowers? asked Vogel.

I...you see...flowers are all I know. Forgive my impertinence, but would you tell me, which is your favourite flower?

Tulips, said Vogel, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, and he did up a button on his jacket.

Tulips, said Imre, smoothing his brow, tulips.

Are you mocking me? Vogel asked.

Imre was silent, scrutinizing the officer's face.

My name is Vogel, the inspector said.

I understand, Herr Vogel, he nodded. And, as if the officer's introduction had been intended as encouragement, he continued with his explanation.

The first tulip to flower in Europe opened in burgher Jan Herwart's garden in Augsburg in 1559. Merchants from Cappadocia had brought Jan Herwart the bulbs in hand-sewn leather pouches stuffed with dampened cloths. Or should we accept the assumption that the great Busbecq himself had sent them to him?

Do you know who the great Busbecq was, Herr Vogel? The bust of Ambassador Augier Ghislain de Busbecq, who according to some sources first brought tulip bulbs to Europe from the court at Stamboul, was set up in the botanical gardens of Ghent in the twenties of this century. I saw this work of art in the course of my travels. And imagine, instead of tulips, they had roses and carnations planted in the flower bed surrounding the bust. What do you make of that?

Vogel was silent.

In his mind's eye Imre now saw windy Ghent. Was it just his memory playing tricks, or had he really smelled the salty tang of the sea in the main square of the city? One thing is for sure, he'd caught a really bad cold in Ghent, and had walked the winding, twisting streets of the city coughing and sneezing, unable to smell anything. He rubbed his forehead, and continued.

But it is absolutely untrue that tulips had become widespread throughout the Netherlands by 1570, as Clisius attests.

Imre's eyes glistened serenely.

A wealthy merchant from Antwerp, upon receiving a large consignment of crimson silk that he had ordered for his wife, found that the package from Constantinople included a number of tulip bulbs intended as a present. The merchant had no idea that the bulbs he had been sent were in any way special, so he fried them in spicy oil and vinegar as if they were ordinary onions and ate them, offering some to his wife. Is that not a funny story, Herr Vogel?!

The inspector roused himself, finally managing to speak.

Your lot forfeited any rights you ever had with the Wesselényi conspiracy. It is an old story, but the wound inflicted on our empire is still smarting, still unhealed. We Austrians respect tradition, we draw strength from our traditions, you are quite the opposite. Hungarians, like all the other peoples of the empire, were once the beloved children of the Emperor—until you turned against those who nurtured you! You issued a declaration of independence, proclaimed the deposition of the House of Habsburg in the most shameful, outrageous manner, yes, just at the time tulips and lilacs began to flower. Am I saying this prettily enough for you, Herr Schön? You have forfeited your historical rights. You took up arms against your ruler, and why should rebels deserve clemency? Did not our Emperor ensure all the peoples of the empire peace, civil rights, equality? Did he not free the serfs?

Imre pondered.

Once I dreamt that a clever woman planted a flower garden in a remote, distant place, somewhere in the back of beyond. But one day the dairy herd—because the dairy herd was driven past the manor house every morning and evening—yes, the cows returning home ate all her flowers.

What kind of flowers? asked Vogel.

The cows were coming in from pasture, their stomachs were full, and yet they still ate all the tulips, the daffodils, even the prickly roses, said Imre, nodding.

Vogel sighed, circled the room a couple of times.

Are you afraid? he asked later.

Yes, Imre replied.

You know I can have you hanged?

Yes, nodded Imre.

Revolt, treason, insurrection, armed rebellion, Vogel enumerated the charges, shall we begin from the beginning?

Imre Szép nodded. If I remember correctly, we were talking about tulips.

Tulips, yes, smiled Vogel, feeling better.

Imre smiled too, his gums were bleeding.

It happened in the year 1587, he explained, wiping his mouth, that a famous Hungarian nobleman, Boldizsár Batthyány, routed the Turks in the bloody battle of Kacorlak, even succeeding in capturing their leader, the cultured Ali Bey. The Hungarian nobleman did not treat the distinguished prisoner badly, though he could have had him tortured, had he wished. He showed him his garden, the roses and rosemary bushes, and the pale red and white double-headed carnations that were his special pride and joy. Ali Bey strolled through the garden, absent-mindedly crumpling his white cordovan leather gloves, fanning the flies off his face. Boldizsár Batthyány asked, a trifle aggrieved, why the bey was not paying sufficient attention to his flowers? Were they not pretty enough? Was his garden not well tended? Ali Bey, who, as I have said, could have been tortured, but was not, smiled gently and said, naturally the daffodils, roses and carnations that he could see in Sir Batthyány's garden were beautiful, but only a few months ago he had been strolling thus in the Sultan's garden, and there had seen narcissi that had had exactly thirty-six petals. Goodness, thirty-six! said Boldizsár Batthyány, clapping his hands, and he pledged that if Ali Bey would promise to bring him narcissi with thirty-six petals, he would let him go free.

Imre Szép fell silent.

Look here, Schön, said Vogel, rubbing his face with his fist, I could have you tortured, you know. I could have your nails torn off, your bones broken. You are small fry to me. There are no records of your presence here. You are nothing but a nuisance, unimportant, dirt under our fingernails, you have nothing to do with organized resistance, with those who are still inciting against us. If you were suddenly to die because a chicken-bone got stuck in your gullet for example, it would not be our problem. So talk! Tell me what you know about Ede Kigl or any of the other miscreants in the city.

Imre Szép touched his bleeding mouth, he had no idea why it was bleeding.

Ede Kigl was a journalist, and he was your informer, he said.

Where is this Kigl now?

I don't know, Imre said, shaking his head.

Who killed Inspector Karl Bischof? Was it Kigl? What was Dr Schütz's role in all of this?

I know the inspector was killed. It is the talk of the town, Imre nodded.

But who killed him?! Vogel bellowed.

Look, Imre began to explain, the ladies of the Esterházy family primarily used apples and rose petals to paint their faces. Obviously apples represent the apple of Eve, the fruit of knowledge and the Fall. Have you ever wondered why it was fruit, and not meat or fish, nor even wine, that brought the Fall?

Vogel heaved a weary sigh.

Imre continued imperturbably, I make no secret of the fact that my favourite tree of all is the apple tree. It has no special characteristic, its flowering is no more spectacular than the springtime splendour of the pear, the cherry or the sour cherry. The flowering of the chestnut is beautiful, that of the linden no less so, and silver birches are very dear to me, shimmering white in the summer night like the pale arms of a woman reaching up to the sky, but after summer is over, nothing can surpass the beauty of the apple trees laden with fruit in our gardens.

He fell silent, and they stared at each other, the interrogator and the botanist.

I must tell you about Mama Root, Imre said.

Vogel nodded, tell me about Mama Root.

Some say Mama Root must be a thousand years old, others reckon she can't be more than a hundred. I have no idea how old the lady is, but I strongly suspect we shall never see her again. Mama Root has left, she's gone. And not necessarily because the marshlands along the banks of the Tisza are being drained and the earth is drying out. And whereas one generation ago people used to travel from one village to the next by boat, now they travel in carriages. Where are those endless wetlands with their fields of reeds? Our part of the world used to be a wilderness, a veritable jungle, cut in half by a clear blue streamlet, which sometimes, if we were lucky, pooled into a small lake. Water-lilies, arrowheads, the pink umbellets of bulrushes grew in the blue of the water, and on the banks of the lake hemlock grew so dense and tall it formed a shrubbery, and pondweed covered the surface of the water like bristles cover your face. Mama Root spoke to me of these things on a day that was in no way different from the rest. How often she'd bathed her body in these waters! I do not like the syrupy sweetness of nostalgia, even if I am sometimes overcome by the desire to embellish the past with features and fancies that exist only in our imagination. In a sense we are all living in exile, sir. Most of our legends are past their time. Characters will be replaced and miracles will have to be designed, made and produced. They will be neatly walled off. Any phenomenon worthy of admiration and wonder will be expropriated and will become someone's private property, as if miracles had a physical dimension. And if in the past living things, the earth, sky and plant life served as a source of wonders, an age is coming when we will marvel at the inorganic. We will manufacture miracles, determine

their likely date of expiration and mass-produce them. I could say that God and his saints are miracles that came into being thanks to the spirit of the guild and the endeavours of the intellect. I don't actually believe in God, but I do believe in divine miracles. But whatever may come next, it will no longer be a miracle of the spirit of the guild. Miracles will be bought and kept at home like pets or household goods. You shall have your own miracle, Herr Vogel. You will buy it and keep it as you would a dog or a hog.

A hog? asked Vogel.

I meant that figuratively, of course.

And will my miracle live on pigswill? asked Vogel.

Until you kill it and eat it, sir.

No, Schön, said Vogel, leaning forward, I am not a man of learning. But I am persistent, and I always carry through what I have resolved, and my cunning, believe me, is worth as much as your flowery imaginings. I am stronger than most, so strong, he said, leaning still closer, that I have no need of miracles. Only cowards and weaklings need miracles, Schön.

I am a coward, sir, I am often afraid. I need miracles, Imre said softly, and he then fell silent, pondering. And I think miracles need me, too.

Vogel shook his head in disbelief.

Who were you sending a message to with that story about a blade of grass, Schön?

I was not sending a message, I was just...just telling the story, Imre whispered.

Vogel started hitting his own head with the flat of his hand.

There used to be a grass musician among us, but he... he has gone into hiding.

A what?!

He made music with a single blade of grass.

So he was one of those old-fashioned miracles, was he? asked Vogel scornfully.

As a matter of fact he was.

And what kind of a man was he, this grass musician?

He was from Kosovo. He played music on the last blade of grass from Kosovo.

Vogel sighed wearily.

It will be dark, Schön, he said. It will be so dark you will be whimpering and begging for a glimmer of light. The darkness will not only be outside, but will sneak inside you. It will be dark within your body, dark inside your dreams, and when you wish to speak, darkness will curl out of your mouth like smoke. You will want to shout, but darkness will pour from your throat.

Some flowers, mumbled Imre Szép, wiping a drop of blood off the table with his elbow, like may lilies for example, grow at the foot of densely canopied beech trees. These tiny flowers do not like sunlight, or at least do quite well in

the shade. Wood-sorrel and ivy are other examples. These plants prefer the half-light of the woods, cloudy skies, and yet are still aware of the hidden, huge world breathing above them.

Imre dropped his head on his chest.

The trouble with your lot is that you always see others as flower-eating cattle, as petal-gobblers. You're always whinging about alien, hostile forces, brutal powers, who are trampling everything underfoot in your gardens. No, Schön, it is you who are the petal-gobblers!

There was silence again, Vogel slowly turned and walked towards the door.

That will be enough, he said.

Yes, said Imre, I may have talked too much.

Vogel laughed, yes, you did talk too much. You know what message I'd like to send to Mama Root? he asked.

You want to send her a message? Imre Szép said, raising his head.

Tell her it's over. This is where it ends, and the best thing she can do is never to come out of hiding again. There'll be no more grass growing here.

The next day Imre was sent to Pest with a transport of a dozen or so freshly captured people from the neighbourhood, highwaymen, robbers, bristly priests and silently shivering teachers among them. The mild weather continued, bathed in sunshine the city bade them farewell, Imre stared at the streets with his eyes screwed up against the light. He had not seen his wife, and the heavy shackles weighed painfully on his body.

Imre did not learn what had happened at home until years later. Several weeks of terrible uncertainty went by before Klára received the news that Imre had been found guilty of incitement to murder and conspiracy to overthrow the government, and that he had been sentenced to death by hanging. Everyone knew that Haynau liked hangings. Somnakaj had taken the letter from the motionless woman's hand. He had tried to read it, but had not been able to make out what it said, it was written in German. Klára lay on her bed, helpless, for two weeks. Somnakaj kissed her hands, put cold compresses on her forehead, tried to slip mashed potatoes and grated apple between her lips. Péter, who was well again, had gone, the dirty dog, he always made himself scarce the instant he was needed.

After another two weeks had passed they learned, thanks to the unsparing efforts of Mr Schütz, that Imre's death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. He had spent a few days in a draughty cell infested with cockroaches in the Kriminalgericht in Vienna, then, on a mild morning, to the joyful sound of the violin floating from the wardens' rooms, he had been sent on towards Josephstadt with a couple of fellow prisoners. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

István Vas

Poems

Translated by George Szirtes

Independent Hungary

(Független Magyarország)

An independent Hungary—
A madman's brilliant hole-in-one
In the cloudscape of reality
Illuminating it, then gone.

Light briefly flares, the dark cloud parts:
New battles, armies, maps, new rules...
Surviving, if lucky, in the hearts
Of a dozen poor benighted fools.

A dozen poor benighted fools
Who turn it into pictures, rhyme—
And the blood of thousands flows and pools
In the miasma one more time.

(1944–45)

István Vas (1910–91)

was the contemporary and friend of Miklós Radnóti, sharing a common interest in translation and classical Greek verse forms. His first book of poetry appeared in 1932 and received critical acclaim, to be followed by twenty volumes of poetry, essays and autobiographical prose. Vas's poetry is rooted in reality, creating an elevated meditative verse out of everyday speech somewhat in the manner of the Metaphysical poets, centring on love, time and history, reflecting on the times of persecution and censorship which he had to endure. He was a highly influential poet whose literary presence continues to be strong. A number of outstanding English and American poets have translated him including George Szirtes, who has this to say in the introductory essay to Through the Smoke. Selected Poems *(Translated by Bruce Berlind et al. Selected by Miklós Vajda. Budapest: Corvina, 1996): "Vas seems to pre-exist in the English language. He gives the translator room and allows him to develop the verse at a natural pace."*

Who We Are

(Ezek vagyunk)

In any place we're gathered, you'll not find
A single member of the company,
Not one, who has not done a stretch in prison
At some stage of the Twenties, Thirties, Forties
Or through the Fifties, accused of various crimes,
Look as you will—there is no country inn,
No bunch of people sitting round a table
Around a bottle, whatever the occasion—
Be it some impromptu local committee,
Or a party to welcome the tenant of the house—
None is complete without at least one member
Who could, if he wanted, speak, or else keep silent,
About his time, about what it was like
Behind barbed wire, behind those prison bars,
Quite when or why of no importance now,
Since no-one's bothered who got who banged up,
The air of prison that hovers round them all
Being the same, flattering even the fraudster,
So when a new guest joins you at the table
And it seems the perfect moment to clink glasses,
Don't rush to question him for a quick answer,
Like a screw wanting to know it all at once
But pull aside your chair, make room for him.
Since he is who we are—let's drink to that.

(1966)

Persian Songs

(Perzsa dalok)

(excerpts)

1.
You took half my tabor and tore it to shreds: never mind.
You offered me back the parts that were left: never mind.
It was shredded half-drums that we danced to: each in his way.
Happy the one that can please or forget: never mind.

2.
You think you are wise? Now take on 'love's fool' as your style.
If you think you're full moon, be dust on the road every mile.
With saint and with sinner, with young and with old you must go,
You're not just the king on the board—be bishop or pawn for a while.

3.
Fire and air, banquets, fine wine: she is more.
Beating heart and bursting vein: she is more.
No longer am I held by distinctions of scriptural debate
Issues of faith or doubt, nothing remains: she is more.

6.
I'm not just a drop of water, I am the ocean and all things beyond.
I see and I dare, I'm a mind full of notions and all things beyond.
When I speak the world is filled with the sound of my moan,
Any small detail can moan but I'm the commotion and all things beyond.

7.
If you believe I am simply an entity, then you are wrong.
If you think I'm a moment in eternity, then you are wrong.
I move smooth as a pen on a clean sheet of paper.
I'm the ball that flies when they're taking the penalty: wrong.

12.
It isn't opium or wine, but intellect that makes me light-headed.
Don't disturb me. This is the way I get wrecked, rude and light-headed.
I am on fire, the Oxus boils over, and once again over.
I'm spinning like a top till the sky too is cracked and light-headed.

(1945–59)

László Garaczi

Face and About-Face

Excerpt from the novel

For days they've been sending them down to sweep and rake. It's started, the continuous tidying up around the outer barracks. Until all the leaves are gone, until the trees have gone completely bald, they'll tidy up the yard in their evening free time. They sweep the little piles of leaves into prisms, and when all the prisms have been lined up in orderly rank and file and there is not so much as a single stray crumbling leaf, only then are they allowed to bring the garbage container over. That's the rule. Just as they finish a prism, a gust of wind scatters it and sends another mass of leaves cascading from the trees. It's like scooping water into a leaky bucket. They stand, clutching their twig brooms, and discuss whether or not the time has come. Another gust of wind and the leaves swirl up high into the air, as if longing to alight again on the trees. Gazsi Tóth suggests taking a smoke break. Yesterday Bernát proposed speeding up the whole process, giving nature a helping hand by shaking the leaves from the trees. With a single manoeuvre, taking care of tomorrow's work, getting rid of all the debris at one fell swoop.

Didn't seem like a bad idea, but wasn't practicable either. There were lots of trees, and it'd be impossible, you couldn't shake off all the leaves anyway. Plus the whole thing might cause a scandal. In Private Rab's opinion, it is unbecoming to interfere in the mystical workings of nature.

After putting out their cigarettes, they decide to give it a shot all the same. They walk around the trees; some of them you just have to give a good kick with

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László Garaczi

is a freelance writer producing fiction, plays, scripts, essays and poetry as well as translations from English. The first two parts of his autobiographical trilogy, telling the story of a boy growing up in 1960s Hungary, were published in English in a single volume entitled Lemur, Who Are You? *(2002). The above excerpt is taken from the third part of the Lemur trilogy,* Arc és hátraarc *(Face and About-Face, 2010), in which the author-narrator becomes an adult. The novel is reviewed on pp. 146–52 of this issue.*

your boot. They butt the trees with the brooms, dangle from them, hit them with their fists, shake and tug them. The trees lurch and creak; leaves shower from their branches. They work in a hurry, no time for prisms, it's late, and no one's checking up on them. Tóth manages to get another container from behind the mess hall. Rab and Szabó round up the leaves, push them towards the containers, while Bernát and Mótrik scoop them up and in. Varró and Fater jump up and down on the containers, pushing them down so that they can stuff in as many as possible. By the time *Il Silenzio* sounds they've rolled the two bloated containers back to their places, wisps of leaves poking out through the gaps.

After lights-out, Bones reads by flashlight, Varró tosses and turns on the upper bunk, the mattress bulging through the diamond-shaped holes in the wire, chaff and dust sprinkling onto the book. Bones goes to the bathroom, where you can smell the wet root scent of the night. One of the windows is broken. His body hard, fresh and alert, he lifts his foot, turns the faucet on and off with his toes, pulls his lips back, baring his teeth at the blotchy mirror like a lemur. He opens wide his maw, stares at the roof of his mouth, furrowed like the sands of an ocean beach. He leans closer, the skin of his face is hard, coarse from shaving.

In the morning, as the day's orders are issued, the whole regiment is confronted with the fact of the denuded trees. Instead of drooping boughs, brown, yellow and green the day before, the wind gnaws at bare branches. There's a clear view to the officers' compound. Yesterday evening, the platoon assigned the task of clearing the leaves had, under the cover of darkness, zapped the trees. Everyone's whispering or giggling about it, either with admiration or envy, curious to see if there'll be any consequences.

In the morning multipart rifle training at the outer shooting range.

They get the guns from the storehouse, live ammunition out at the range. Taki Pap checks the guns to be sure they're in working order, last year one blew up in a guy's hand, they had to make a new ID card for him when he was discharged because of his face.

Taki Pap and Andersen supervise the exercise, the wind dies down, it's cold and the air is clear, visibility is good. Lining up on the range they're told if you shoot well, if in three shots you hit the ten three times, if you shoot thirty and you get the following routine task right you get three days leave. They would pass out the ammo, but the trunk is nailed shut and no one has a pair of pliers. Ensign Andersen lifts up the trunk and smashes it on the pavement. Interesting, he notes, that it didn't explode.

First they take a practice shot. They divide up the ammo, three rounds each, the rounds jingle in Bones's hands. Next to him Varró rattles them in his tremendous palms like three grains of oats.

Hit the circle in the centre, the size of a coin, three times from two hundred metres. It had been years since anyone had managed that, and the guy had been a sports marksman as a civilian.

They lie in place, load, the long, streamlined shells bearing the stench of death disappear into the chambers, everywhere you can hear the clatter of the safeties being unlocked. Taki Pap walks the line behind them, kicks their legs apart, they look like a row of Ys lying on the ground.

Bones is concentrating on what Bernát had been explaining on the way, how to get his heartbeat down into his knees. You empty your mind, don't think of anything, don't think of the denuded trees, the hair growing on your chest, forget poor Mikos and his burns, the tea gurgling in your bowels, the mop and the itchy fungus on your thigh, everything. Cease to be. You cease to be, and your heart beats in your knees. You have to wait, on the crest of the hill the crisscross of barbed wire, somewhere they are burning fallen leaves, an infinitely barren landscape, yet so many details. They give the order to shoot, the cracklings begin to resound, the gun kicks hard, cease firing, they stand up at attention.

Taki Pap looks at the targets through binoculars. He sends a man to gather the sheets. Bones hit the third and fourth circles, at the bottom left, near to each other. If he'd shot accurately, it's because he'd managed to gauge how much the gun was off. They pass out the next rounds of ammo, anyone who hits the bull's-eye three times can go home. Opportunity is hovering tremulous in the air. His gaze bores into the distance, he and his rifle melt into one, suddenly he senses that someone is looking at him, he glances up, and on his right he sees a naked old man with a white, tousled beard sitting cross-legged, his hair dishevelled, staring at him with sparkling blue eyes.

Good lord, I've lost my mind, I'm hallucinating.

He aims not at the black circle, but rather to the upper-right to correct for the flaw in the sights of the gun, he sends his heartbeat into his knees, he doesn't breathe, he goes numb, his whole being is taking aim, focusing on the point in the distance. Slowly he pulls the trigger, a light touch on his shoulder, the old man leans his elbow into his palm, as if he were helping, another moment, then boom, he concentrates, fires again, boom, boom, he winces, can't keep himself from blinking. The hot shells tumble out at his side. The others start to fire with such an awful clatter that his ears begin to ring. They come to attention, then stand at ease waiting for the results. Taki Pap reads the numbers out to the clerk, they stop when they get to one of the sheets, look at it closely, the group captain shakes his head in disbelief. The private standing beside him glances back as if he were looking for someone. Ensign Andersen says, no fairy-tale ending here, Andersen is dead. Sabján continues, throwing his voice: Snow White became a whore, they raped the dwarves.

They call out their names, Gáspár Tóth and Sabján shot the best, twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Then they call out Bones's name, Taki Pap clears his throat and says: thirty.

They stand mouths agape, eyes bulging, hands in the air. The clouds stick to the sky, suddenly they all harden in the motionless space of an old

photograph. A hot wave bursts up from Bones's gut, he feels dizzy, everyone turns towards him. He can't remember going over to get the sheet. He can't even look at it, Bernát immediately snatches it from his hand, they pass it around, no way, they whisper, no way. No one is paying attention to Taki Pap, who is reading the last results. They pass around Bones's sheet like a sacred object, a relic, looking flabbergasted at the paper one moment and Bones the next, Bones, who is speechless, just grinning foolishly.

Taki Pap gets sick of the chit-chat, calls them to attention.

For the next half-hour Bones feels like someone being pushed through a tube, but stuck halfway.

At lunch they toss sixty tins of food from the truck onto a tent flap, along with ten loaves of bread and fifty kilos worth of apples. There's a thin layer of salty aspic on the tops of the tins of meat.

They keep glancing at him with disbelief and envy, then the mood changes. They start to look on him as they might on an invalid, as if there were something wrong with him, as if he were not entirely normal. The second shooting exercise begins, the routine task. Every time the rifles pop, his nerves shudder. He gets the ammo, loads, gets into place, awaits the command. He closes one eye, looks through the sights at the range where the enemy will attack. The half-figure pops up, the fibreboard kraut, he slides a few metres to the side, they have to shoot him down in six rapid-fire shots. When they hit him, he shudders, whispers Heil Hitler, and falls into the dirt.

He knows the whole platoon is looking at him. Even the guys lying down are half-focused on him, watching him. Taki Pap is standing behind him, his legs apart. Some of them are already shooting when the kraut pops up in his stretch of the range. Stocky body, small, round head: a village butcher reenlisted as an Oberleutnant. He slides from left to right, rigid in his pose, the cables creak. Bones fires immediately, the rifle jumps in his hands, he pulls the trigger again.

The kraut slides to the end, stops, vanishes.

Rapid-fire, private, rapid-fire, Taki Pap yells.

Yes, he had screwed up, he had let go of the trigger, he had shot single shots instead of rapid-fire. And even so he had missed, but he still had four bullets. The brown fibreboard rose up again, so close you could have hit it with a rock. The remaining ammo should be shot all at once, rapid-fire, it couldn't fail. Hit with the first shot, afterwards it's harder with the barrel jumping in your hands.

Again he notices the shadow, he doesn't look towards it, just strengthens his peripheral vision for a moment: the same naked old man. His teeth clenched, he forces himself to focus on the plywood Nazi gliding through the grass. He aims right at the bastard's heart, just above his heart to the right, to be more precise, taking into account the faulty sights, but when he starts to shoot he feels something strike his ribs on the side where the old man is sitting, a nervous twitch runs down his arm, maybe that's why he pulls the

trigger too fast. The barrel leaps up, knocks his hands and shoulders back and forth, he tries in vain to control it, keep it on target. Then he just shoots, shoots, the earth spits up dirt as he fires, he smells the odour of gunpowder, and he can't believe his eyes, the kraut is enwrapped in a cloak of immortality, unwounded, sliding with dignity to the side of the stretch, where he stops, steps onto the invisible paternoster and vanishes.

Everyone stops shooting, a mighty silence breaks over the land. At the edge of the horizon a flock of crows floats westward along an invisible thread. Taki Pap's yelling wakes him from the end-of-the-earth numbness, damn it soldier, you're going to shoot that fucking kraut or I'll kick your ass. He gets Bones another six rounds.

Bones can't speak because of the plaster hardening in his throat. Now everyone is staring at him, the boys in the dugouts beside him too, leaning on their elbows. He waits. He looks to the side. No doubt about it, in the centre of the military firing range, surrounded by watchtowers, a strictly secret location protected with double barbed wire, a naked old man was sitting on the ground.

No, there's no way, it's the demon of self-loathing, don't concern yourself with him!

He presses the rifle to his shoulder, at which the old man leans towards him and prods him in the ribs with his outstretched middle finger.

He tries to wrap himself in a cocoon, become numb, deaf, his body hard asphalt that they poke in vain, the proddings blocked by the armour of frozen nerves. Only his eyes and his right index finger are alive, he focuses all his attention on them. He loathes the wooden Nazi, wants to riddle him with holes, blow him to pieces. When the Kraut pops up, he aims and fires, all the bullets have whistled from the barrel and he is still pulling at the trigger. The kraut hasn't even reached the middle and he's out of ammo, in the descending silence you can hear him continue on his way along the squeaky cable. When he reaches the end he stops with a creak, almost as if he were taking a bow, auf Wiedersehen, he whispers, and vanishes.

Something could happen, the apocalypse could break out, but no. He hears the people behind him, the despairing and angry clamour, Taki Pap screaming, the swearing, but he just stares at a small tree in the distance. He wants to be that tree. His mind begins to clear as they await the order to board the truck. Ensign Andersen looks at him with pity and disgust. Bones doesn't hear what he is saying, only sees his mouth say no fairy-tale ending, Andersen's dead. He sits on the platform, it begins to rain, he stretches out his hand, two drops fall on it, one vanishes, the other remains on his palm.

Meanwhile back at the barracks the news is spreading that they are launching an inquiry into the case of the denuded trees. The officer on duty examined the containers bursting with leaves, consulted Major Juhos, deputy commander of the regiment, questioned the commander of the guard who had

been on duty the previous evening, then called in Gáspár Tóth, head of the cleaning platoon. Tóth testified that at just about half past eight a stormy gust of wind had torn the leaves from the trees, to which Major Juhos replied that anyone who deliberately damaged a work of nature serving to conceal a military objective and furthermore compounded his wrongdoing by lying would find himself before a military tribunal.

After lunch Sabján comes into the barracks for the reserve divisions and with a ratfink smile announces that to the best of his knowledge they can only avoid lockup if they can get the belt of forest surrounding the compound back to its original state. Suck my cock, says Gáspár Tóth, and Sabján raises his eyebrows, his mien hardens, he sticks up his middle finger and leaves.

They speak with a clerk who can't confirm the news, then group captain Rácz runs in, platoon, attention, and as red as a lobster he gives the order, doesn't care how, but by tomorrow there'd better be leaves on those fucking trees. If tomorrow they don't find the training grounds looking just like they looked before they're going to turn the case over to internal affairs. Sabotage. They could get as much as two years. And then they'd have to do the full two years of military service, not just the eleven months for students with deferred admission. That's a total of four years, and they'll be barred from admission to all the universities in the country. They don't have to take part in any of the drills tomorrow, but they can't be in their barracks either, only on the training grounds.

You had to believe it. That it was not a mistake, not some bad joke. We've humiliated mother nature, said private Rab, disturbed the rhythm, and now we have to atone.

They push the garbage container along and talk about whether or not the officers who had made the decision knew the ancient soldier's tale of reattaching leaves or had come up with the idea themselves. They get some empty straw mattresses, Technokol Rapid fast-drying glue, scotch tape, and Gáspár Tóth manages to buy a bottle of brandy from one of the warehousemen on the sly, they all chip in for it.

The soldiers watch them from the windows, they point, yell, they want to see how the trees are going to grow their foliage anew, they stop on their way to the mess and shout words of encouragement.

They open the container and the wind immediately scatters the upper layer of the hill of leaves. What should they use, Technokol Rapid or scotch tape? Bones and Rab don't offer an opinion, ever since the exercise at the shooting range Bones has been in a half-dream. The brown figure in the field bows again and again, and giving a creak disappears into nothingness.

There are twelve of them, and they have to re-foliate forty-one trees, roughly three each. It's not even that big a deal, you can do it. A kind of obstinacy and combat fever start to come over them. Bones decides to use the Technokol

Rapid. Standing by the box full of red tubes, he picks one up, *quick-drying glue, for use with paper, leather, fabrics, glass and wood, fumes can cause drowsiness and dizziness.* Wood. Woods. Lots of people think you can get high off Technokol Rapid, but you can't really, Palmatex and the Bulgarian glue Kale work much better. Technokol smells good, but it's missing the essential ingredient, toluene.

Bones gets the three trees in the corner at the far side. He climbs up the first with glue in his pocket and sacks full of leaves on his back. He is out of the sight of the others, but the guard walking alongside the fence passes by beneath him every two minutes, looking at him with curiosity while he works.

There aren't just horse chestnut trees encircling the training grounds, there are poplars, sycamores, and a little cluster of white-trunked birches by the dining hall. In general Bones knows tree names, he even likes the sweet-sounding ones, maple, ash, poplar, cause they have interesting overtones, but as far as which one denotes which tree, he has no idea. He knows the trees as a sight, a spectacle, on the one hand, and as names, as words on the other. Sometimes there is some connection, he recognizes pine trees, birches and horse chestnut trees too. Fruit trees too, if they are bearing fruit.

Echoing flappings, the wind whips the regiment flag, and another noise, sharp, jingling, as the metal wire they use to raise the flag slaps against the pole. He's still in the trance he fell into after shooting, but the fresh air and the cosy feeling he gets from sitting alone in a tree help him regain his senses. He grabs a bunch of leaves from the sack, looks at them in the swaying light of the lamp. Last fall Kamilla had sent the same kinds of leaves in a big envelope, she had written on them with a marker the places where she had gathered them. Course there weren't just horse chestnut leaves in the sack. He was going to glue birch leaves, oak leaves, sycamore leaves, and who knows what other kinds of leaves to the horse chestnut tree. Spread the glue on the stem, maybe an oak leaf, shaped like an outstretched hand. He sticks it to one of the branches and it stays.

Gáspár Tóth's whistle announces the break, they gather at the edge of the square, drink brandy, have a smoke. They agree to leave the upper, slenderer branches to the end, tomorrow they'll re-foliate them using a big ladder. Tóth brings a different kind of glue, a little drum of Palmatex. Bones has never seen Palmatex in a drum, in industrial packaging, just in tubes. Tóth says it's just reserves for safety's sake. They return to their places, each to his trees. Bones wrenches off the circular lid of the drum and takes a whiff.

The work is going better and better. He's not really looking at what he's gluing or where, his hand moves quickly and regularly, he repeats some simple melody, tara-ra-tara, following in time with his hand, takes a leaf, spreads the glue, sticks it to the bough, takes a leaf, spreads the glue, sticks it to the bough. Beneath him the guard strolls by, but he has not looked up for some time now.

He has made a nice little den of leaves around himself, he is not cold, as if his little recess held in a bit of warmth. Leaves are stuck to his jacket as well. He executes an interesting manoeuvre when he has to switch from one tree to the next, the brandy helps, he comes down without needing anyone to give a whistle, and if no one is around, he takes a good whiff of the Palmatex.

He builds splendid lookouts and hanging gardens, leafing himself up until he can hardly extricate himself from the leafy chamber he himself has constructed. He papers the trunk with leaves of various colours and shapes. After the third rest break he is in a state of euphoria, a fairy-tale empire unfolds before him. He forgets his defeat on the firing range, the hairy body, the nightmares. Yes, when he had been ordered to this wonderful barrack it had been the happiest day of his life. Creative energies arise within him, he can hardly wait to go to the next tree.

No one wants the Palmatex, they're fine with scotch tape and Technokol, he is laying an exclusive claim to it, it's his. The next time he takes the whole drum up with him. He nestles down between two thick branches and takes a deep whiff of the manna.

I'm Polly, little Polly, he whispers, sitting on a branch, I'm chattering and flying. Space expands, time explodes, he soars with outstretched arms into the sky. Beneath him the ocean sways white. The wind howls, the bright, cigar-shaped airplanes stand motionless on the blue horizon. He descends, the skyscrapers poke towards the sky, then snowy peaks, the yellow mirror of a desert striped with highways. The ocean comes into view, he lands next to a waterside campfire. The flames crackle cheerfully, girls with long hair and guys with beards sit in a circle. Someone is playing the guitar. They show no amazement, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a soldier in uniform speckled with leaves to plop down from the clouds. Torn blue-jeans, music, smoke, and, as it is written, they're smoking pot, clinging to one another and singing ecstatically. A girl smiles at him, her snow-white teeth shine, she has a garland of flowers on her head. She takes his hand and leads him to a caravan. Colourful blankets, incense burners, the ocean sparkles through the window, you can hear the song and the crash of the waves. The girl undoes Bones's belt and unwraps him from the M65-model training fatigues. He has been waiting for this for a long time, for millions of years, to lose himself in the hot, throbbing nothingness. Hand in hand they go back to the fire, the hippies clap, laughing.

Good lord, he has found his beloved, his brothers, his relatives! They are playing the guitar, singing, passing him joints. Smells like cow dung, and makes him cough. He thinks of Kamilla, he should be doing all this with her, he looks at the girl, her green eyes look like Kamilla's.

They ask what life is like back where he came from, and he tells them how he has been gluing fallen leaves back onto a tree. They are all delighted by what

they hear, with general acclamation they vote to come to his aid. They put small white stamps on their tongues and set out in a V-shaped convoy, like wild geese, for Europe. They go around the clouds, the flocks of birds, the airplanes, the astonished look of a pilot: long-haired hippies plough through the sky, at their head a crew-cut soldier boy wearing glasses.

They alight on the horse chestnut tree, the wind has died down in the meantime, the stars are glittering, it must be about midnight. Bones, the good host that he is, offers them a sniff of glue. The hippies speak well of it, good stuff, then one of them takes a guitar in hand, the others get down to work, they sing Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, their hands busy all the while. Bones recites the poem "Hymn for all Seasons" by László Nagy, emphasizing in particular the lines, *"If there is a right, it is my right, / Here all power is mine, / I strap on my helmet, my blade! / My beauty, you come to my aid!"* Then they all sing together again, tougher songs, Hendrix, Stones, even Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin. They're warbling out *Stairway to Heaven* in chorus when the watchman stops beneath them. There's been a change of guard, and he's curious to see how the work is going. He can still feel the warmth of the guardroom in his limbs, he twists his neck with gloating curiosity. His teeth click together, he reels a bit, and when he comes around again two minutes later he casts only furtive glances upwards.

The same thing.

In the army compound of the second battalion Revolutionary Regiment a horde of long-haired hippies, under the leadership of a monkey-faced soldier, is humming *Child in Time.* The third time round he just squints up out of the corners of his eyes, then he doesn't cast his glance anywhere, just keeps it fixed in front of him. Trembling, he counts the minutes until the next change of guard. In the guardroom he sits on the bunk, doesn't say a word to anyone, tries to calm down. When he presents himself for duty again he asks them to put him at the back, as far as possible, near the pigsties. The commander of the guard is quite taken aback, no one likes to be near the sties because of the stench, and it's far away, this is the last change of guard, watch duty's longer. No, he definitely wants to go to the pigsties. He trades with one of his fellow soldiers, and he's been plodding around the path behind the sties for some ten minutes, listening to the snorting, the grunts of the sleeping pigs, when a stocky figure pops up in front of him.

Stop or I'll shoot, he says, pushing in the magazine.

The siren sounds, the whole compound swarms with commotion, searchlights scan the skies and the fence. The officer on duty calls the commander of the regiment, they alert the subordinate units, everyone lines up in the corridors. Turns out one of the men on guard shot a pig by the sties. He's in a state of shock, they're taking him to the sickroom. He's raving, something about hippies and how the CIA has attacked the compound. They give him a

shot and he falls asleep. The soldiers climb back into their beds, still warm. The foliate brigade, a reserve platoon of the eighty-second mortar squadron, is given permission to discontinue its work. Done, finished, at least for today. Leaves are stuck to their clothes, as if they had all turned into trees. They straighten up and make for the barracks. Two hours of sleep before reveille.

The pig is still lying on the path, his blood steaming, slowly congealing in the cold. In the morning they put together a report and assign a company to clear away the remains. It's foggy, but when they issue morning commands everyone can see that the trees surrounding the training grounds are bulkier, you can only see little patches of the officers' compound on the hill.

Bones's every pore exudes toluene, not just his mouth. He looks like a guy who's blown a chewing gum bubble and had it pop in his face. No one pays him the slightest mind. He shaves his moustache, scrapes the grey scales off his skin.

The commander of the regiment examines the carcass of the swine, then walks once around the compound. His face disappears between his service cap and his collar. The trunks and limbs of the trees are wrapped in motley leaf wallpaper, the bare tips of the branches reach out from the pied clumps. Soon the compound is empty, they let everyone go home for Christmas. Comrade Minister Lajos Czinege has personally given the order, and it applies to all those awaiting deferred admission, except for anyone against whom disciplinary measures have been taken. So thus the trees come to see the New Year. In January they set a whole cleaning brigade on them, and by spring the only thing that remains of the interlude is a few little budlets of scotch tape. Then the flood of green inundates everything. ❧

Translated by Thomas Cooper

Miklós Vajda

Scenes from Adolescence in a Minefield

A Memoir

In memoriam Béla Abody

Part 1

A warm autumn afternoon, or early afternoon, like every warm autumn early afternoon, and yet different. Now as I search my memory more thoroughly, it was more spacious, more exciting and longer-lasting than all which followed. The sky above was higher and more azure, the sun a more glittering gold. Full of promise; pulsating with the sheer happiness, freedom and incredible fascination of discovered existence. The very air of that warm autumn early afternoon was clearer, the sounds livelier, the tree boughs, turning russet, were rocking more gently in the mellowing sunshine, the contours of things were more sharply etched. Maybe only the early afternoons of the next day and thereafter outdid it, for yet another year and a half or so. The year was 1947. We were adolescents, rebels, daring, brainy, curious, ignorant.

Boarding

A bus pulls up at a stop on a corner of what is today Móricz Zsigmond Circus in Buda. There is a long queue, among them three students, by now grown into gangling youths, from the nearby famous Cistercian Grammar School. The bus is crowded, stinking and wheezing, it's a miracle it is still breathing and going at all, like the city itself, which has staggered to its feet from the ruins. Those who are getting off get off, those who would board, at the conductor's urging, board. Which is when one of the youths, a six foot six, plump, fair-haired giant, pushes everyone aside, setting a foot on the steps of the bus. Even

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while the bus was still only pulling up he had been impatiently shuffling his feet in preparation for boarding. On his features were mingled the genuine horror of an idiot with the grim determination of a martyr preparing for death. He shuffles his feet, averts his eyes to the heavens as if he were calling on assistance from that quarter, meanwhile emitting whimpering noises. With one hand he compulsively scratches at the skin of his face, in the other he grasps the handhold; it is impossible to board beside him. People discreetly pull back; no doubt the poor creature suffered some shell-shock during an air raid at the time of the siege, they think to themselves. The boy then, as if having had second thoughts, yanks his foot back off the step, has a short think, no doubt reassuring himself, scratching his face while softly whimpering before trying with the other leg. It's clear he has no physical problems with boarding; he's simply unable to decide whether he truly dares board or not. In alarm he yanks that foot back as well and, after a brief period of shuffling, cautiously has a try with the other one again. This time he almost manages to lift himself off the pavement, but his courage again suddenly deserts him at the last moment. Even so he does not give up, no way! He launches into the next attempt, looks around with crazed glances as if to draw spectators into his mute struggles before heroically making up his mind, taking a deep breath, and once again setting one of his feet on the step. The tension among those who wish to be on their way keeps growing. The scene has lasted one or two minutes, and a few try to offer assistance, but he brushes aside hands that are extended towards him: it is up to him to overcome this obstacle! A further minute ticks by, with the bus's antique engine wheezingly puffing out its pong. The conductor, a finger poised over the bell in the ceiling, calls out impatiently from inside the bus: Move down for those getting on, please! During this scene, the way it develops, pity, readiness to help, forbearing smiles, irateness, fury and horror appear in turns, in roughly that order, on the faces of those already on the bus and those wishing to get on. At some point where it is now plain that the redeeming dramatic catharsis is not going to happen, the public mood switches into impatience and they push aside the whimperingly protesting idiot, who finally, with a long and distressing sigh, head bowed, acknowledges this failure of his umpteenth attempt to board a bus. Like a big, beaten dog, tail pulled in he slinks back with a devastated expression. People get on and the bus finally sets off.

There were three of us left at the bus stop: Abody, Tomasz and me. Béla was the only person I know who was able to perform a solo number like this, or to be more accurate, a mini- or monodrama, one he himself had invented, with a straight face in front of a real audience. He gave them the collective title 'paranoid manifestations', and proudly included them in his rich repertoire. This particular piece acquired the title 'Boarding'. Its origins were to be found in the metamorphosis of his flops in the gym. The flop, as a show, a successful

act, as a diverting piece which calls for no small performing skill, a poker face and guts. When in the right mood, at our request, he was willing to trot forth a performance anywhere and any time. People may be still alive who can remember the miserable young idiot who was mentally unable to get onto buses. The two of us, Tomasz and I, would stand behind those who wanted to get on, howling with laughter, tears rolling down our cheeks, as we watched this spectacle, which in any case was done purely for our benefit and acquired new elements from one performance to the next. Béla was at the centre of our circle, and he did everything to stay there. Along with Tomasz, the three of us formed the hard core of that circle, with others in our class often gravitating to us as the occasion demanded.

"So?" Béla would ask after the bus had gone and he stepped up to us. "How was I?" He glanced at his watch. "Three minutes forty-five seconds. Not bad, but it still needs a bit more work—I've got to get up to at least four minutes."

Already then he had long recognized the advantages that can be won from unfavourable physical endowments. In the autumn of 1941, when we started at the grammar school, on the very first day of teaching, while everyone in what was to be Class 1/b tried to find a place for themselves, and introducing ourselves was in full swing, a fat, fair-haired hulk of a boy strolled with heavy steps into the classroom, his features not exactly picture postcard, but certainly striking—like someone in his teens already wearing his adult face. He went over to us all, one after the other, and with a brisk military bow stretched out a hand, saying in an orotund voice: "Anderlik." This was so startling that all of us took immediate note of him. And from then on he took good care that, wherever and whenever possible, he should be the centre of attention.

A good five feet four inches tall by the age of ten (he was over six foot six in adult life) and growing thick reddish hair all over his arms and legs, the heavy-footed, fair-mopped kid had huge feet and podgy fingers that could be bent back frighteningly. The class teacher, a plump, strict but jovial monk stuck nicknames on each pupil. Béla Anderlik (whose family before long adopted the Magyarized name of Abody) was dubbed The Aged Hippo. He was more mature than the rest of us not just physically, but also mentally. For years it was only the unusual humour and grotesquerie with which he carved out a certain respect for himself that were accepted not just in the eyes of the class but by some of our teachers too. Even before he had reached puberty, a strong, resonant voice and deep laugh issued from his capacious chest, making him a well-known figure throughout the school. He loved being in the public eye, and in certain subjects —Hungarian literature, history, divinity—surprisingly he sometimes had a query, an opinion, indeed at times a polite dissenting opinion which, on occasion, he would bring to a teacher's notice by his odd, totally singular forms of wording: "If you would allow me, Sir, and then only with due deference, to point out that...," or "May I be so free as to note, although if one thinks about it...," or "In

the light of Aristotelian logic, therefore, although one might suppose, assuming, but not granting that..." and the like. To our ears texts like these were unheard of. He made a lasting impression, not just on us but on some of our teachers as well, who often condoned him. There would be times when, in responding to a question to which he did not have the answer, he carried on a form of collegial discourse with a teacher right over our heads and then developed it into a kind of professional dialogue between equals. Whether for amusement or out of curiosity, some teachers would go along with it for a short while.

When the class accorded some intended shaft of teacher's wit the customary mild, servile laughter, he, the one and only person who truly understood the totality and the true profundity of sir's humour, would generate a long, deeply resonant chortle of hilarity in the back desk, upon which the whole class would break out in a howl of laughter, and the teacher, if he had not caught on, would imagine he was the most irresistible wit alive.

Béla, however, attained his true popularity in the gym. At first The Aged Hippo had great problems keeping in step when at the start of every lesson we had to line up in threes, in soldierly fashion, and march repeatedly around the splendid gym. Left–right would be roared out in stentorian tones by our athletically built lay PT master standing in the middle, accentuated by his whistle and, at times, clapping, but Béla had a hard time dealing with all this. He moved to his own clock, but before he could be brought to heel the teacher was called up for military service, and before long he was in fact killed in Russia. His successor, at all events, was a polar opposite: small, wan and feeble, the stench of changing rooms that had been in use for generations and sweaty gym kit—shirts, shorts and gym shoes—had permeated his soul.

He had no idea how to cope with Béla, who tried very hard, albeit not in order to win praise from the teacher. When it came to the high and long jump, climbing a rope or walking the beam, the wall bars, the vaulting horse or the parallel bars, Béla enacted what was, in effect, an early, as yet crude *Urfassung* of 'Boarding'. Head slightly to one side, he watched whatever exercise was supposed to be done with the concentrated attention of a goody-goody. When it came round to his turn, after a lengthy hesitation and shuffling of the feet he would make several extremely spirited but clumsy and from the outset hopeless attempts before standing to one side with a big sigh and a doleful, stricken look on his face: what was one to do if fate did not wish for this to come off for him.

The teacher would seethe, but said nothing, and we howled with laughter. Taking encouragement, Béla later on increasingly played the whole thing for laughs, exaggerating the endeavour, then the bungling, reaping noisy plaudits, with even the PT master letting slip a wry grin every now and then. Béla Abody compensated himself for being unable, really and truly, to execute things that even the thickest of thick-brained boys were able to accomplish with ease by making us laugh at him. In so doing he lifted himself from being a simple target

of derision and, as it were, distanced himself, placed himself in quotation marks, setting himself on another, higher plane on which there was only him, where he was no longer ridiculous but amusing, original and a guaranteed success, and where everyone was looking at him. And that was the most important thing.

From the moment that this method worked and became embedded, he was no longer ashamed of his clumsiness; indeed, through his comic efforts he was even able to express irony and superiority. He also presented the caricature of people who had no problems of that kind: He would parody the typical warming-up routines of athletes—the twists of the trunk, the arm circling, the jumping about, and the victor's panting gestures of gratitude towards the spectators—performing them as a sort of elephant ballet to storms of applause. Through all this he showed his contempt for physical attainments, later even ideologizing it. With poorly disguised envy, 'phallic triumphalists' was what he called those athletically built, good-looking boys, above all those who went down well with girls—the term in his vocabulary being a synonym for dickhead.

Rational irrationality

After those performances of 'Boarding' that glorious autumnal early afternoon, we went back to the Poster. The Poster was a cast-iron advertising pillar that had been slapped round a scrawny sapling on one of the corners of Móricz Circus, a memento of turn-of-the-century Budapest. On it were detailed the weekly programmes of the State Opera and the National Theatre inter alia. This is where routes home for us three diverged, but we could hardly bear to be parted.

The Poster, then, was holy ground for us, a sort of agora and simultaneously an arena, a site for exchanging ideas and tips on reading pleasures, fierce debates, competition, planning and huge gusts of laughter. It was not unusual for us to stand around in excited conversation until late into the evening. By then we had long been devouring all the classical, modern, and especially contemporary Hungarian and world literature which did not figure in the arch-conservative literature textbooks of our Church grammar school. Not a day passed without our discovering something new and worth arguing over in literature, in music and ideology. Every novelty had to be talked over. What interested us most at the time was, first and foremost, literature of a progressive intent, which described the misery of Hungary's poor peasantry and the untenability of a system of landholding based on large estates. We greedily swallowed everything from Hungarian sociologists to Ortega y Gasset, from historians who analysed the tragedy of East Europe's track record, from writers who laboured to produce the nation's regeneration to Marxists, but with great excitement we read the works of Freud, Lipót Szondi and Jung, Thomas Mann, Attila József and Miklós Radnóti, to say nothing of the literary

periodicals. We watched the incipient radical transformation of society, the necessity and anticipated success of which we were naïve enough to be largely in agreement with. The middle class into which we had been born and which was able to get back on its feet once again after the war, was doomed—and that we somehow did not perceive. The vast political, economic and intellectual might of the Catholic Church was crumbling before our own eyes; our monastic teachers lost their certainty; our textbooks, indeed much of our upbringing, became useless—something we experienced as liberation, intoxicating freedom. After many spiritual vicissitudes and much torment, hundreds upon hundreds of masses, prayers, sermons, pious exhortations and reading material, reciting the rosary, contrite confessions, penitences and absolutions, maybe even as a direct consequence of that overdose, the conviction grew in me that God must have abandoned Providence if there ever was such a thing, because how otherwise could one explain the dreadful war which had just passed and human history in general? And what if everyone who trusted in Providence were able to realize their cherished desires? A disaster, I reckoned. We argued on points like that; Tomasz did not share my view. Interest governs the world, not merit, I drew the surprising, original conclusion. Béla shared that opinion. God had disappeared—from me for sure, I declared. That in itself was an exciting and liberating feeling: it was me now who would decide what was right and what was wrong. In that respect Béla was more cautious, keeping for himself a little let-out: "Rational belief in the irrational—that's my motto," as he summed it up. "Though it's more interesting vice versa, of course."

By the start of our last school year, the autumn of 1949, our grammar school had been taken over by the state, our Cistercian teachers had vanished, being replaced by lay teachers, several of them quite outstanding, given that the school had a high reputation. One day at the beginning of 1949, following the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, the Primate of Hungary, a "circular letter", as it was called, went the rounds of the school. That was the name given to administrative announcements which were taken round from classroom to classroom while teaching was in progress, in all cases to be read aloud, signed by the teacher before the monitor for that week took it on to the next classroom. On this occasion the crude Communist text, which approved of the arrest of the Primate and demanded harsh measures against the machinations of "clerical reaction", urged his stringent punishment. It quite clearly stemmed from some source outside the school, but everyone had to sign. Our deathly pale lay teacher, a new man, looked over the deathly pale class before slowly nodding twice and then, after a brief hesitation, he added his signature. We all followed suit. We sensed that this was a serious, epoch-making historical moment. In that resigned nodding was concentrated, down at the local level, the impotent submission of an entire nation, but we were not yet in a position

to register this. Afterwards a bleak silence descended on the class until finally the teacher regathered his faculties and, without a word of comment, carried on with the lesson.

Maybe already the next day yet another circular letter turned up, this time a protest against the baseless political charges that had been levelled at the Church and the Primate. One will never know who had had the courage to pick a fight with the Communist powers which were then settling into place and to accept the consequences, though in the end these did not materialize as the dictatorship had not yet developed fully and had more important things to do. The teacher this time—another teacher—thought briefly before signing, followed by the whole class without any hesitation at all. No, none of that, we telegraphed to one another with mute facial expressions in the back row of desks—we don't want any of that.

We didn't want that, but a Western democracy, along with all that entails. We felt that accomplishing this would be a gigantic task which awaited the coming generation of intellectuals—ourselves, in other words. We decided that we would work out the possible modes of transition to Western democracy, the path by which Hungarian society would be transformed, lest we were caught unprepared when the moment came for action. With that in mind, on Tomasz's proposal, and on the model of the meetings held during the war by sociographer-writers who, concerned about the fate awaiting the country, sought to reveal the conditions in which the peasantry existed in Hungary, we would give lectures about the various possibilities, debate these, and then pool labours to hammer out a set of 'Leányfalu Theses'. Five or six of us met in the Abody family's summer cottage in order to get to know and discuss each other's ideas. Béla himself came forward with a voluminous text which took in Athenian democracy, "the criminal stupidity of the philistines", Robespierre, the individual and the community, social equality, the categorical imperative and quotations from Hungarian poets, the Communist Manifesto and the Bible. It was witty and aphoristic and, in all, a fairly unserious flight of thinking, in spirited and serious rendition. Tomasz drew on thinkers who discussed the fate of the nation and the recent past, whereas I waded through an at the time frequently cited 1942 work by the German economist Wilhelm Röpke, *Die Gesellschaftskrisis der Gegenwart* (The Social Crisis of the Present) with particular regard to the part on *Der dritte Weg* (The Third Way), out of a conviction that it was not advisable to adopt ready-made solutions.

I no longer recall which of us started laughing, but at some point the entire pompous, infantile undertaking, lock, stock and barrel, suddenly became so absurd and comical that we broke out into uncontrollable chortling and howls of laughter. In our relief, we laughed inordinately at ourselves.

Vrekk! Les enfants horribles

Even as the Communist noose was slipping round the throat of our own class, we were in rebellion against it. My poor widowed mother, for example, on returning home dead tired from work at that time spent her evenings, at my express insistence, on removing the intolerable crown of nobility above her family initials from all bed linen, towels and kitchen cloths. At the Poster it began with us just rewriting in thick pencil on the opera and theatre bill for the week all the words which could be used for our own ends: Tosca—Toxic; Abduction from the Seraglio—Abortion at the Arsenal; Aida—Vajda; Amonasro—Antonescu; Rosenkavalier—Rosencrantz the Liar, and the like.

Later on, more original and wittier ideas were born in front of the Poster.

We started by making very loud, nasty Communist remarks about passers-by. We even had a battle cry: *Vrekk!* This could be pronounced any number of ways: softly, elongated, enigmatically, mockingly, enticingly, interrogatively, rapidly repeated, irritably, excitedly, but in chorus and threateningly was the real thing. Béla's cavernous depth served as a pedal point under our readier registers. People, not knowing how to take this intimidating 'vrekking', would stare at us in stupefaction and alarm. The era when anything could happen to anybody anywhere at any time was already under way, but people still possessed the ability to marvel and, in some cases, even laugh as well. We furnished the odd-looking figures who regularly made an appearance in the neighbourhood with ridiculous sobriquets. The first person, on whom the name 'Kaffir' was bestowed, was a gaunt, stern-looking, silver-haired, pointy-nosed, bespectacled, elderly gent, who wore spats and was dressed overall in the splendid elegance of a bygone age; his two upper incisors stuck out like those of an aged buck rabbit. I'm not sure who was the source of the name 'Kaffir', but we were so closely attuned to each other that it found instant enthusiastic acceptance: it couldn't be anything else. We supposed he was a retired ministerial counsellor, a tax-office man, or possibly a high-ranking law officer. His spouse at his elbow, he would invariably take an afternoon constitutional along much the same route, with a stately swinging of his cane, looking stern-faced as if he were inspecting his realm. It was 'Kaffir' who inspired one of Béla's newer numbers, one he later on often performed with others: 'Sniffing', a 'paranoid manifestation' which was to become a classic. Tomasz and I would again look on from a distance as a knowledgeable audience. Béla would go over to the Kaffirs as they were looking at, say, a shop window, and slowly and thoroughly sniff the hat that the much shorter Mr Kaffir was wearing, then, shaking his head, walk on with heavy steps. Alarmed, Mr Kaffir would quickly snatch his hat off, turn it round and round, inspect it inside and out before finally sniffing it himself, but when he caught sight of Tomasz and me laughing uproariously at him from a respectable remove, he

would jam the hat back on his head and choking with indignation would stalk off hurriedly, horrified spouse in tow. From then on the married couple changed their usual route, but we came across them again, and they would always be the recipients of at least a couple of fearsome Vrekk!-s from us. If they happened to find that they were coming face to face with us, poor Mr Kaffir, a very picture of injured and in any case calamitously undermined bourgeois dignity, would even from far off flourish his stick menacingly at us, though all to no avail. There was no escaping us, but they wouldn't call a policeman; in those days middle-class citizens like them did not lightly initiate any sort of contact with the police.

'Dusting Down' was another of the numbers that nobody but Béla would have dared to perform. I greatly envied him that ability, but I realized one has to be born that way. At all events, Tomasz and I were true gourmets in our enjoyment of Béla's interpretation, but whereas Tomasz viewed it from a standpoint which presaged the scepticism of an outside observer befitting the internationally famed professor of microbiology at New York's Rockefeller University that he was to become—"Look at what that crazy dumbbell is up to again!"—and heartily laughed at the performance but would, nevertheless, enthusiastically play his own part in them. I was (and still am) enormously impressed by Béla's unsurpassed originality, audacity and exhibitionism, laughing over the productions with sincere amazement and empathy, with jealousy even, and, yes, a measure of pride. In all my life I have never met anyone else who would have been capable of inventing any of these paranoid manifestations and, what's more, pulling them off without the least twitch of a poker face.

He would pick out someone in the street, go over, beg their pardon and, with a polite quick bow, introduce himself as, say, Vendel Endrédy (the one-time abbot of Zirc and prior of the Cistercian Order in Hungary) and ask to be permitted to brush down the back of the person's coat: "By your leave, it looks as though you may have leaned against something," he would fret fussily. On obtaining permission, he would at length very thoroughly brush down the person's back, which would not of course be dirty at all. He would get thanks and an appreciative smile for doing so: thank goodness there are still a few decent, polite young men around—the smile would convey something like that. "A Scout's duty is to be useful and help others," Béla would declare modestly, giving another quick bow and racing off to help others.

Not long after that he came up with a still more refined and enthralling version of 'Sniffing'. 'Biting a Hat' could only be done in a crowded tram or bus, in front of a queue at the cinema box-office—anywhere with a throng of people. Béla would pick out a suitable male target, bore in behind him, and then carefully and literally bit the brim of the hat—of course always in such a way as to give us a good view (his eye ever on the appreciative audience for which he was playing). From that bite the hat, depending on the type, would

tip forwards slightly or perkily lift up a bit, though its owner would not be able to see why. Béla would beg his pardon, as if he had accidentally knocked the hat, given that he was at least half a head taller than anyone else.

Then there were spur-of-the-moment, one-off skits which, by their very nature, never found their way into the repertoire and therefore were never given a title. One day we happened to be in the rear carriage of a tram when one of us noticed that the door to the driver's cab at that currently vacant end of the tram was not locked, and safely tucked away in one corner of the driver's ledge stood a carefully wrapped small saucepan—obviously the driver's supper. We unwrapped it straightaway: in it was a mound of strong-smelling cabbage pasta which, its surface glossy from congealed fat, was pretty disgusting, and beside it a separately wrapped pickled gherkin. The mound of pasta was picked up by us and bolted down without a moment's hesitation, but then Béla took the sizeable and drooping gherkin and thrust one end of it into the opened fly of his trousers and, with the facial expression and sounds of the idiot in 'Boarding', he slowly went down the carriage with one hand clutching his gherkin. Several passengers spotted him and one even got up to help him, or whatever he had in mind, but Béla, speaking in his normal voice, thanked him, assuring him he could manage on his own. Then he pulled the gherkin out of his fly, took a bite, and got off the tram with us.

On another occasion we were strolling in the Circus around evening, no doubt on the look-out for prey, when Béla suddenly picked up a small dog which happened to be sniffing around at the foot of a wall, stood on tiptoe and dropped the terrified animal, its legs flailing, through an open window. Seconds later yapping and screaming could be heard from the room. Satisfied, we moved on. In the Circus, sooner or later, one or other of the characters in our crowded gallery of waxworks figures would surface and we would pursue in order to favour them with the usual 'Vrekk!' and maybe a performance of 'Sniffing'. One unforgettable character was the man called 'The Half-sucked Acid Drop', a fishy-looking young man with slicked down hair and indistinct facial features, who was forever hurrying around in a shabby mac. Dr Meinschwanz, a man of around forty in enormous shoes, would flat-footedly slap his way around, the cares of several thousand years engraved on his face, eternally lugging a crammed-full briefcase to some place or other. As we imagined it, concealed in the briefcase was a chef-d'oeuvre that was the product of a lifetime of endless working and sacrifice, and that is what he was peddling from one publishing house to another. He would not let the manuscript leave his hands for one minute, not even in bed or on the toilet (the book was even given a title but I have forgotten what that was). I also don't recall the phiz of Monsieur Foche Trésbieux, just as the features of Messrs Shantung and Kip Gulped Up'n'Down have also dropped out of the memories of those carefree autumnal early afternoons of a long-gone adolescence.

The name of T34, the tank so memorable for us from the Soviet assault on Budapest at the time of the siege of the city, was bestowed on a grim-looking, dumpy, middle-aged, bespectacled lady in a loden coat and Tyrolean hunter's hat who toted a haversack and wore hiking boots over thick, knee-length knitted woollen socks, and whose feminine charms closely matched those of her eponym. Her greying hair was cropped in a manly fashion, and she never made an appearance without that haversack, which plainly contained her personal survival kit, we established. After a brief discussion we agreed that this comprised knickers, a canteen of water, a roll of toilet paper, a bar of chocolate and an apple or pear which would be changed on a weekly basis, a box of matches, a torch, a bottle of aspirin, a prayer book, and even a rosary in the event of a new war, siege, arrest, earthquake, flood, Apocalypse, etc. We did not Vrekk! her, just accompanied her for a long stretch of the way silently and conspicuously, visibly getting on her nerves.

The street outrages went on month after month, and only whatever tutelary divinity looks after teenagers (clearly there is one) protected us from getting caught, scandal and the long arm of the law. We were itching for trouble; we were well aware of the danger, deliberately courted it and enjoyed doing so, happy to have each other's company in a constant state of intellectual excitement and adventure. We would have rebelled against anything, but history which was shaking the ground beneath our feet anticipated us, so that we ended up laughing at our own rebelliousness.

One genuinely risky project was a collective creation with a prewritten script. Ten, fifteen or more boys from our class organized a 'spontaneous demonstration' on Fadrusz Street close to the school. "The rope for aristo-crats!" we yelled, neatly scanned, in chorus: *The-rope-for-aristo-crats!* The march aroused startled shock among passers-by, with people coming to a standstill and staring utterly dumbstruck. At the time it was—as yet, still—a monstrous demand, and more than a few, suspecting the worst, quickly vanished from the scene. By then we were already into the initial period of terror, with black cars pulling up at doors and doorbells ringing at night, mass arrests and political show trials. At a prearranged point in the scenario, the menacing figure of Béla Abody made an appearance at the end of the street, like a police officer who was on his day off but nevertheless, at the sight of this breach of the peace, unhesitatingly placed himself on duty. He drew a proper officer's sword with tassels from under his coat; he had won it at cards somewhere. As planned, he bobbed up on the scene "post-haste", brandishing the sword and made a start on "dispersing the crowd", meanwhile bawling out in his cavernous voice: "Move on there, please! Nothing to gawk at here!" This became 'Flat of the Sword', but there was no repeat performance.

Another collective work born in that strife-torn period was a pantomime with the title "Write Down—Write Off!", again with Béla in the lead role.

Tomasz and I, along with him, would stand in front of the floor-length front window of the Gourmand Café, which still exists today on Kossuth Lajos Street in the city centre. Béla bent close to the window with us standing on either side behind. With a baleful expression on his face he would slowly, from table to table, take stock of what in the usage of the Communist press of the day were the "hostile, reactionary, freeloading, déclassé, exploiting, bloodsucking, class-alien, currency-speculating bourgeois, Western lapdog, etc. elements", and with a finger pointing them out he started to move his lips soundlessly, while we would pretend to write down what he said. The café would be cleared within an amazingly short period of time, after which we moved on, highly satisfied, to another one.

The Singer

The Poster also marked the site of many a furious discussion over music. We often went to the Opera together, seeing each one of the legendary productions of Otto Klemperer's years as Intendant of the State Opera House, and all the rest as well. Tomasz and I were taking piano lessons but had voracious appetites for the symphonic and chamber-music repertoire as well, going to many concerts besides. Béla, on the other hand, was only interested in Italian opera—Verdi, Puccini and *verismo*—with a touch of Gounod, Mussorgsky and Wagner also coming into consideration ("the apotheosis of sublime tedium" was how he termed the last-named) on account of their monumentality, tragic aspect and heroic pathos. Mozart was "infantile squeaks". His dark-toned baritone voice had an incredible range, power and glorious ring, and he was seriously preparing for a career as an opera singer, which would also allow him to write, he reckoned, for he saw himself also becoming a writer.

His musical studies largely took place in the auditorium of the Opera House and by radio or gramophone, committing many things to memory by ear (though he did not have perfect pitch) and constantly performing snatches of arias, even bits of scenes with several voices, with traditionally comic operatic gestures and mimicry, though completely à l'Abody. He could provide wicked parodies of all the well-known singers, including the altos and mezzo-sopranos. Among the fragments of operatic librettos that he wove into his speech: "my Prince", "I, as lawful Tsarevitch", "Lohengrin's my name", "What news, jester?" (*Rigoletto*), "I lived for art, I lived for love" (*Tosca*), "By the marmoreal heavens I swear" (*Otello*), were those he most often used.

He had all the makings to become an accomplished singer. He even accosted the Opera House's celebrated *Heldentenor* on the street, and asked him for an audition. The singer predicted a great future for him provided he forgets everything he had learnt before, and starts again from the very beginning with a teacher, but first and foremost learns how to read music. That was something

we had already said to him, but he had never learned to read music notwithstanding the fact that for years singing lessons at our school were taught by a famed musicologist monk. Scores were for 'Philistines', Béla voiced that contemptuous opinion more than a few times, adding "All that's needed here is a voice, and I've got plenty of that" before bellowing out into our ears, at staggering volume, the curse of Amonasro, defeated king of Ethiopia. That gave birth to a new, highly successful Abody number. At the grammar school, in the breaks between lessons, Amonasro, the baritone king of the Ethiopians, would steal down at night among the reeds on the banks of the Nile to meet secretly with lovely Aida, his daughter, and curse the girl, who had been enslaved and had dared to fall in love with dashing young Radames, commander of the victorious Egyptian army. For the short sketch, which was performed with a frightening face and realistic movements, he would choose a boy to act as Aida. He would grasp him by the arm, and in the echoing corridor roar out at an awesome belt *"Non sei mia figlia, dei Faraoni tu sei la schiava"*, jerking the poor lad forward with such force that he would sprawl on the ground and be knocked black and blue, sliding along on the stone floor. Béla, though, showed no mercy and repeated the scene, refining and polishing up the production. Aida then fled, but the performance was such a hit that several of our classmates volunteered to take on the role.

At sung masses on Sunday Béla's sustained voice would often resound in the choir for fifteen or twenty seconds after the other singers' voices and the organ's final chords had died away. His vast chest could hold enough puff for two ordinary singers. The choirmaster would gesticulate and look daggers, downstairs at the altar the officiating priest would wait in annoyance to be able to carry on the liturgy, while a wave of tittering would sweep round the faithful—and all the while Béla's sometimes ever so slightly flat voice would ring on.

He was quite incapable of sustained and regular exertion which only promised distant and uncertain glory, and he presumably squared that with his thirst for success simply by shrugging his shoulders and imagining that one could indeed learn everything by ear, the strength and bloom of his voice, and that the passionate authenticity of his interpretations would enthral the experts and overcome all petty professional carping and cavilling over breathing technique, voice production and other technical rubbish. He kept on dropping in references to famous singers who had not completed any advanced musical training. Nothing could shake what he believed in.

It was still undecided whether he would become a *Heldentenor* or baritone, when he made up his mind to produce a recording for the birthday of his current girlfriend, because of whom he was insanely jealous (with every justification, it has to be said). The honour of being chosen to accompany him on the piano fell to me. A company used to advertise its services in the papers

using the strap line "Sing a tune—take it home!" That was where we put together the production that a primitive structure recorded by scratching it onto a used X-ray film of someone's lungs or kidneys. The result was similarly ghostly, sounding ancient and very distant as if from underground. Béla ingeniously intended the production as a message for his perfidious lady-love, for which he picked two passages from Verdi's *Otello*. In the first of these he sang both parts of the well-known duet at the end of Act 2 in which Otello and Iago swear to take vengeance on Desdemona *("Sì, pel ciel marmoreo giuro")*. This called for some slight rewriting of Verdi's score, with Béla singing the two roles, now the villainous baritone of Iago, now the tenor voice of Otello, as he saw fit. *"By-y-y the marmo-o-o-real he-e-e-avens I swea-her"*—that was the essence, the bit into which he put it all: jealousy, passion, volume, mimicry. In the other passage Otello, half-crazed by jealousy, delivers a self-tormenting monologue beside the bed of his now strangled spouse and, acknowledging her innocence, draws a dagger and stabs himself.

In the rehearsals, which were held at my place, he would always turn up with the full gear: a range of Italian recordings of *Otello,* along with eggs and bicarbonate of soda. The latter, he explained to me, were used by singers to 'warm up' and polish the voice. He would launch into singing scales at an astounding volume but so out of tune that I was frequently obliged to intervene on the piano. From time to time he would gulp down a whole egg or two with some bicarbonate of soda. Then, as we set to work, it turned out that he hadn't the foggiest what Verdi had actually composed. Tempo, rhythm, melodic line, correct pronunciation—those were all pettifogging details that were of no interest to him. He was guided by his own notions and could sometimes be distressingly out of tune, but there was no denying the stupendous heroic power and passion that he invested in the production. He would surprise me with unexpected improvisations, so I had no easy task at the piano. He not only roared but also acted out the roles, with expansive gestures, violent stamping, frightful facial expressions, and the tiny groans and whimpers that he would throw in at the end of sustained notes to express pain, or the prolonged terrifying death rattle that he gave at the end of Otello's aria. What the girl who was the object of these amatory pursuits thought of the production there is no way of knowing. ❧

(to be continued)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Pál Pritz

The National Interest

Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century

History rarely heeds the neat parameters of a century. Yet a century can turn out to be longer than its years. When it comes to Hungarian foreign policy we can begin around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and hasten to add that the ensuing century was long indeed. The politically wise generation of Ferenc Deák, József Eötvös and Count Gyula Andrássy,[1] which helped to form the Compromise of 1867, was superseded by an altogether more self-confident one, which sought not to strengthen the dualist arrangement but to transform—or indeed destroy—it. This ruling class, for the most part, was blithe to the gathering storms in the rest of the world. For Hungary, it all culminated in the forced signing of the devastating document in the Grand

1 ■ **Ferenc Deák** (1803–1876) was a leading figure of the Hungarian reform-minded opposition to Habsburg rule in the Reform Age (1825–1848). Minister of Justice from March to September 1848. After the defeat in the War of Independence in 1849, he formulated a policy of passive resistance to Habsburg absolutism. As from 1861, he worked for an agreement with the Austrian Court. Published the Hungarian conditions for a Compromise in *Pesti Napló* at Easter 1865. After the Compromise of 1867, he refrained from accepting a government post but continued as a member of parliament; **Count Gyula Andrássy, Sr.** (1823–1890) went into exile after the 1848–49 Revolution and War of Independence. Was sentenced to death in absentia in 1851 and amnestied in 1858. Returned to Hungary and worked with Ferenc Deák. Served as prime minister from 1867. Was the successful foreign minister of Austria-Hungary between 1871 and 1879. Had a prominent role in the convocation and the deliberations of the Congress of Berlin in 1878; **Baron József Eötvös** (1813–1871) was an important public figure as early as the Reform Age. Served as Minister of Religion and Education in 1848. Went into exile after 1849 but returned in 1853 and was among the architects of the Compromise together with Ferenc Deák. Reappointed minister of religion and education (1867–71) initiating important legislation (on public education, the emancipation of Jews, national minority rights).

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Trianon Palace on June 4, 1920.[2] The blow smote on Hungarians is barely fathomable. Even a historian familiar with the subject finds it an onerous task to properly grasp its implications and retell the story.[3]

Self-assurance is no bad thing; ambitious projects after all are not for the faint-hearted. But carried to excess, it seems like fiddling. The elephantine Neo-Gothic edifice of Parliament built on the Danube embankment between 1885 and 1906 is one example of the excess of the *fin-de-siècle*. Hungary had little to justify such an ambitious show of imperial pride: nowhere else on the continent was there such a huge Parliament (its London counterpart is only a few centimetres bigger). And halfway through its construction, in 1896, the Government decided to stage lavish celebrations of the thousandth anniversary of the Hungarian Conquest (as it happens, 895 was the decisive year in the process of Magyar settlement).[4] Let's not forget, either, that the Royal Palace on the opposite bank of the Danube was rebuilt, growing twice its original size yet lacking any real function since the shared ruler governed his empire from Vienna.

Besides indulging in grand projects, the prewar ruling class was blind to the need to bring the people into the fold of the political nation. Instead, they busily conserved their privileges at any price. Skilled and hard-working builders had erected an impressive Parliament. Did the lawmakers inside live up to the promise of that magnificent edifice? Endre Ady perhaps went too far when he described it as "a beautiful nest of robbers". Whatever the case, it is fair to say that debate in

2 ■ Hungary suffered the severest peace terms among the vanquished of the First World War. The territory of the country shrank to a third (93,000 km² from 282,000 km²) and the population was reduced from 21 million to 7.6 million. Over three million ethnic Hungarians found themselves outside the frontiers. The Peace Treaty prohibited the raising of a conscript army and the country lost the greater part of its mines and industry.

3 ■ We cannot give a fair account and have to be content by reporting: György Barcza, an erudite and well-informed diplomat, was in Copenhagen at the time of the signing of the Peace Treaty. In his memoirs he recalls that Danes who were not hostile towards Hungary at all told him bluntly that Hungary had got what it deserved because it had been an ally of Germany. Still, he commented: "...my entire consciousness and political sense told me that no Hungarian should ever sign that Peace Treaty." Casting aside his expertise and reserve, this is how he goes on formulating a position incompatible with his training as a diplomat: "No doubt, the Entente would have occupied Hungary if it had rejected to sign the Peace Treaty; moreover, it would have given a free hand to our revengeful neighbours, who demonstrated their attitude to us in territories that had been ceded into their possession and we would have had to live under the most difficult conditions for years. But I would have faced any suffering rather than voluntarily attaching my signature to such a dictate... Occupation by the Entente would not have lasted for too long; indeed, it would not have been longer than a few years as it would have exhausted the Entente... on realizing our resolve, they would have *perhaps* revised their position... after all, if Hungary weathered Ottoman Turkish rule for 150 years, it could have weathered a rule of some years by the Entente or Czech-Serbian-Romanian troops knowing that by doing so, we can *perhaps* eventually save the future of the country. We would have certainly won the appreciation of the world at large." (*Emphases* – P.P.) György Barcza, *Diplomata emlékeim 1911–1945* [My Memoirs as a Diplomat]. 2 vols. Compiled and edited by László Antal. Annotations and afterword by András D. Bán. Editorial history by John Lukacs. Budapest: Európa, 1994, volume I, pp. 149–150.

4 ■ Celebrations of a modest scale in 1895 would have been enough yet the Government wanted to think big and 'corrected' the date to 1896.

the chambers on irrelevant constitutional issues surpassed any genuine effort to help the country along the path of progress. Prime Minister István Tisza was upstanding. Yet his protracted wrangling with a coalition of parliamentarians—whose main occupation was to proclaim empty nationalist slogans—consigned him to preserving the status quo rather than modernizing the nation.

Hungary was a partner nation of Austria, and its influence on foreign policy was in keeping with that status. The Danube Monarchy, a Great Power in the conventional sense[5]—though, by then, not in a modern sense[6]—possessed a foreign policy, but one which was confined to the Balkans. Early in the century, it opposed reviving local national liberation movements. The sole concern of every step—every step to interfere in Balkan affairs—was to secure its own future and to contain the centrifugal forces of its national minorities. The Hungarian prime minister was in the position to influence that foreign policy. And István Tisza took an active part in isolating Serbia, helping its ally Bulgaria by turning it into an economic and military player, and ensuring Romania's loyalty.

Historians agree that the Greater Hungary, as founded by Saint Stephen, fell for two reasons. First, Hungary lost the war at a time when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was no longer able to carry out its traditional role of keeping the balance of power. Second, it failed to win the support of the national minorities, which received encouragement from nationalisms that were diametrically opposed to Hungarian nationalism. So people who place the blame for the emerging situation *solely* on the selfishness and narrow-mindedness of the Hungarian ruling classes are unhistorical and ideologically motivated—and therefore wrong.

But three things *are* certain. First, the powerful can achieve more than the powerless. Second, there is little doubt that the holder of power, István Tisza[7], had the chance to act more wisely. It is enough to quote his notorious words spoken in Sarajevo in September 1918: "If we mean business, forget the slogan of national self-determination!... Have I come here to listen to such nonsense?"[8] Third, everything that happens has a cause, and nothing disappears without some trace. Even a lost cause can leave its mark, while individuals and regimes that thought of themselves as (ultimate) winners are bound to turn to dust in time only to be reborn in some modified form later.

5 ■ In terms of its size of territory and population and the number of soldiers it could mobilize.

6 ■ In terms of the dynamism of its economy and the ability to export capital; the character of its social set-up and the standards of the education and culture of its population.

7 ■ **Count István Tisza** (1861–1918) was a steadfast supporter of the dualist system of 1867 and a conservative-liberal statesman. Prime minister in 1903–5 and 1913–17. Contrary to popular belief, in 1914 he opposed the war. He only agreed to the ultimatum to Serbia (the equivalent of a declaration of war) under pressure by Vienna and Germany.

8 ■ Ferenc Pölöskei, *Tisza István.* Budapest: Gondolat, 1985, p. 268; Gábor Vermes, *Tisza István.* Budapest: Osiris, 2001, pp. 460–461; László Tőkéczki: *Tisza István eszmei, politikai arca* [The Ideological and Political Characteristics of István Tisza]. Budapest: Kairosz, 2000.

In the modern age, nationalism is the engine of foreign policy. Let's simply define nationalism as national feeling (thereafter we can ask whether or not nationalism was justified or how far it defended some justified national interest, whether it served progressive or reactionary forces, at what point justified national interests collided, how a third party—a smaller or greater country—benefited from that conflict or was hurt by it). The nation, however, is a historical category—even if speeches by politicians sometimes claim otherwise—and its content is largely determined by the people in charge. That is why charges of high treason and betrayal of one's nation are so risible. Enjoy public respect one moment and you'll be a traitor the next. When political winds change again, another law declares you a great son of the nation. Only time will tell how one national interest or another declared by the powers-that-be actually turns out in the end. A politician may be marked as a traitor. But unless he is subject to criminal law,[9] he cannot be said to commit high treason. Rather, the relevant question is: does a politician represent the national interest well or badly?[10]

Until the rise of nationalism, dynastic interests were the engine of foreign policy. Until 1918 Habsburg emperors (Francis Joseph I and Charles I) were heads of state in Hungary. However, this had been the age of nationalism for quite some time. So whereas the ruling dynasty had a say in foreign-policy decisions, the interplay of national forces—which now strengthened, now weakened one another—was the dominant factor shaping foreign policy.

Making use of the opportunities born out of the Compromise of 1867, Hungarian foreign-policy makers did much to assert Hungarian national interests. Count Gyula Andrássy[11] won acceptance for an arrangement whereby the ratio of officials in the diplomatic service domiciled in Hungary should match the Hungarian contribution to the costs of managing joint affairs (called the quota). Although Hungary was unable to ever fully realize that ratio, in time it came quite close to it. (In this light, it is worth noting that personalities were of great importance in day-to-day politics and foreign policy.) Hungarian foreign policy had been successful, too, in asserting national interests. In 1868 it managed to ward off an attempt to convert the dual into a trial monarchy. In the relationship with Russia and in dealings with the Balkans, Hungarian interests were asserted to the limits of what was realistic.

Eleven nations inhabited the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Their interests were so diverse that, though Vienna-Budapest was the centre of power, its foreign policy failed to reach the seas, let alone the territories beyond them, even though

9 ■ When, say, somebody sells state secrets for financial compensation.

10 ■ It is not my intention to dispute that there can be several cases in between but perhaps the above phrase catches the essence of the issue the most clearly.

11 ■ See footnote 1.

such matters went with Great Power status. Efforts made towards achieving a more dynamic foreign policy were less than effective owing to the structural problems described above, which considerably limited its effectiveness.

It is certain that Hungary's decisive role in the outbreak of the world war in 1914 did not serve the national interest. Yet even a statesman as strong-minded as Tisza could not avert it. A whole library of books surrounds the subject. The relevant literature is so extensive because the argument was a dialogue of the deaf carried on between people who dealt with the facts tendentiously and neglected important relevant aspects, whether intentionally or inadvertently.

Tisza knew that Hungary would not be able to maintain its prewar position. If Hungary won the war, the Germans would call the shots. If it lost, the Entente would open the floodgates for the national minorities' desire for independent statehood.

What was fated was bound to happen.[12] On 3 November 1918 General Viktor Weber signed the armistice agreement in Padua on behalf of an Empire that had ceased to exist by then. Not only national issues were on the agenda in the Danube Basin but social ones too. Social revolutions were fought and won.

A particular Hungarian tragedy, however, was the failure of the so-called Chrysanthemum Revolution associated with Count Mihály Károlyi[13], Hungary's leader between 1918 and 1919 during its doomed affair with democracy. This not only failed to defend Hungary's pre-Trianon frontiers but it could not realize even its own policy: the creation of a Western-style democratic Hungary.

Criticism of Károlyi generally falls on two counts. First, he was naive about the real intentions of the victors, and, second, he was slow to defend the pre-Trianon borders. The first has substance, but as for the second charge, his detractors wilfully misinterpret the military convention signed in Belgrade on 13 November 1918[14]. That was a momentary success which was later torn to pieces by the logic of the victors' interests. Those who criticize Károlyi for neglecting the defence of the country overlook the fact that the soldiers were up to their necks in the war. What mattered to them most was defending their own region. They prized a better life for themselves more than the fate of some remote corner of the Monarchy. And we should underline the fact that Károlyi

12 ■ Revengeful soldiers assassinated István Tisza in late October 1918. An observant Calvinist, his final words were as follows: "The hand of Destiny."

13 ■ **Count Mihály Károlyi** (1875–1955) was one of the richest magnates in Hungary. A radical supporter of democratic reforms before and during the First World War, in opposition to a pro-German foreign policy. Led the Chrysanthemum Revolution of 1918 and was President of the first Republic of Hungary.

14 ■ The general armistice agreement signed at Padua did not determine demarcation lines for Hungary. Germany was still a belligerent nation at the time and the Allied wished to deploy their forces in the Balkans against them, moving through Hungary. A Hungarian delegation went to Belgrade to negotiate ways in which the resulting damage to the country could be reduced to a minimum. Since Germany capitulated on 11 November, there were no Allied troop movements through Hungary, and Clemenceau refused to recognize the convention signed at Belgrade as an agreement of general validity. The Paris Peace Conference then treated the convention as an agreement entered into by the local representative of the Allies.

was not in a position to defend the historical kingdom of Hungary.[15] He did make political mistakes, however. In a terribly thorny situation into which he was forced by the Entente (the note associated with Lieutenant Colonel Ferdinand Vix[16]), Károlyi failed to assess the domestic political situation adequately, convinced that by handing over power to the Social Democrats he would remain head of state.

In his memoirs György Barcza, an eminent member of the Hungarian diplomatic corps in the interwar period, who served as minister to the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1941, expressing what many of his contemporaries thought (as many today think), denied that Károlyi's revolution was national[17]. Barcza argued that it did not serve the national interest. But the democratic revolution of autumn 1918 really stood on a national basis. Although it proclaimed itself a *people's* republic on 16 November, it was more national than popular. It was national too in the historical sense of the term, which expresses that (given the very long period of ethno-genesis) a wide gap existed between the people and the political nation.[18]

Barcza was wrong when he wrote that it was a bloodless revolution. In the absence of reliable research, the exact figures are unknown. But there is much evidence to show that not only the Soviet Republic and the ensuing counter-revolution were bloody, events at the time of the Chrysanthemum Revolution also resulted in casualties.[19] It was the task of Károlyi's democratic revolution, more than of later regimes, to bring the fierce passions that had accumulated over four years of a war of the masses—entirely senseless in the eyes of millions of participants—under control. Countess Ilona Batthyány and her friends were

15 ■ It is not my intention to suggest that the way Hungary's borders were redrawn was the only possible scenario. If Hungary had been shrewder in negotiating with the Entente, adjusting to the international conditions and manoeuvring in the political arena, the frontiers could have been drawn in a more favourable way.

16 ■ Lieutenant Colonel Vix arrived in Budapest in late 1918 to oversee the implementation of the Belgrade Convention. He served a note on the Hungarian Government on 20 March 1919. Its wording was unfortunate, also from the point of view of the Allies. Its meaning can only be understood in a broader context. The Allies intended a war of intervention against the Russian Bolsheviks with the support of Romania. The Romanians however claimed that they could not attack in the east because "Hungarians ready to attack" were there behind them. The note presented by Colonel Vix therefore sought to set up a neutral zone. The eastern limit of the proposed zone approximately coincided with the future Trianon frontiers. Its western boundary cut deeply into areas inhabited only by ethnic Hungarians.

17 ■ Barcza, op. cit., vol. I, p. 116.

18 ■ The people and the nation have not become one down to this day. However, discussing that issue would be beyond the scope of this article.

19 ■ For more details, see Tibor Hajdu, *Az 1918-as magyarországi polgári demokratikus forradalom* [The Democratic Revolution in Hungary in 1918]. Budapest: Kossuth, 1968, pp. 85–103. Speaking at a conference of the Hungarian Historical Society in March 2009, Tibor Hajdu said: "For the present reawakened counter-revolutionary sentiment it [i.e. the Hungarian Republic of Soviets – P. P.] was a disaster, a low point in Hungarian history. The number of the victims of the 'Red Terror' is exaggerated even though it was lower than that of the White Terror or that of the law-and-order operations of the Chrysanthemum Revolution." *Századok Füzetek,* no. 5 (2009), p. 5.

right when, in the early days of November 1918, they issued the slogan that "Support Mihály or else Bolshevism will take over."[20] Károlyi acted in the spirit of that recognition.[21] The ire of the people and resulting mob violence would have meant death to many aristocrats. Count István Bethlen also had to flee from his estate at Sámsond in Transylvania (Şamşud, Romania). He and his family hid in a nearby canebrake. At nightfall they fled to Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş). Barely escaping the lynch mob, István Bethlen could see for himself that the 'problem' was lawlessness rather than Károlyi's revolution.

Had things been different, he would have fled abroad. But he chose revolutionary Budapest where he was safe and where, for a while, he took part in politics with Károlyi.[22] A state of martial was declared and law and order were restored in towns and villages. In doing so, this policy followed national tradition. Emotional and tactical considerations prevented it from breaking with the ideal of the Hungary of King St Stephen.

The past is misinterpreted by those who argue that the Hungarian Soviet Republic—with its northern campaign which was initially successful—did more for Hungary's integrity than the Chrysanthemum Revolution. I am the last to deny the value of the northern campaign, but facts show that Béla Kun and his associates[23] expected an imminent world revolution and that the Entente was not tolerant of the new regime at all (the base promises of Georges Clemenceau notwithstanding). In fact it was at that very time that the Entente powers modified their views to Hungary's disadvantage, and the decision-makers voted in Paris in favour of allotting Western Hungary to Austria[24] (lest Austria follow the example of the Soviet Republic).

After the Bolshevik regime collapsed, a counter-revolutionary regime followed. The Entente and the Romanian army occupying Hungary—in August, it even eagerly entered Budapest—assisted its establishment. The

20 ■ Tibor Hajdu, *Károlyi Mihály. Politikai életrajz* [Mihály Károlyi. A Political Biography]. Budapest: Kossuth, 1978, p. 286.

21 ■ That shows the absurdity of the view that in March 1919 Károlyi voluntarily handed over power to Béla Kun.

22 ■ Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary 1874–1946. A Political Biography.* Highland Lakes, NJ: Social Science Monographs, 1995, p. 85, pp. 87–89.

23 ■ The reference is to leading figures of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. **Béla Kun** (1886–1939) headed that regime. A prisoner of war in Russia during the First World War, in November 1918 he returned to Hungary as a Bolshevik. Founded the Hungarian Party of Communists, which sought to overthrow the democratic republic of Mihály Károlyi from the far Left. Technically, he "only" became Comissar for Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, being aware that the fate of his regime depended on the international situation.

24 ■ German Austria was formed following the disintegration of Austria-Hungary. It lacked any Austrian national consciousness. To make this new state viable, it needed a "breadbasket" and western Hungary (today's Burgenland) was ideal for that purpose. For that reason the Allies revised their original position, and, yielding to the Austrian Government they awarded that territory to Austria, a decision more justified from the ethnical than any other point of view.

Social Democrats returned to their original programme. The national interest, in their view, could be served best if, with the help of the Entente, they created a bourgeois democratic regime. Miklós Horthy and his associates, who were gaining in strength among the counter-revolutionaries, believed that a markedly anti-liberal, authoritarian regime best embodied the national interest. However different the two visions were, both camps regarded as self-evident that the Entente should be the moderator of the debate (which also meant that it would not be decided within a national framework).

Sir George Clerk acted as moderator. Although his own sympathies, and of the powers on whose behalf he acted, favoured Garami and his associates[25], he had no option but to negotiate a compromise that involved concessions to both sides. That is how a *limited parliamentary system* emerged, whose details were to be elaborated by Bethlen. Although the regime became badly distorted after the Prime Minister resigned in 1931, it remained viable down to March 1944, when German troops occupied Hungary. (To this day the character of the Horthy regime is still hotly disputed. Some describe it as a repulsive repressive regime; others come close to likening it to a Western-type parliamentary democracy.)

The postwar political class was convinced that they would best serve the interests of the nation if their first priority remained the restoration of the country's prewar borders. The Social Democrats, weak to start with (and of lessening influence) and the democratic liberals, who were even weaker, called for a revision of the borders along ethnic lines and were therefore repeatedly accused of being deficient in national feeling. In fact, such a policy would have best served the interests of the nation. The official policy was unrealistic in its essence.

The basic contradiction of Hungarian foreign policy between the two world wars was that the policymakers and their supporters—those endowed with a modicum of common sense—were well aware that the country lacked the strength to restore Saint Stephen's borders, nor was it likely that this situation would change in the foreseeable future. If that dream was to come true, Hungary had to seek the support of those Great Powers which were dissatisfied with the Versailles peace settlement. Potential allies were Italy and (a gradually strengthening) Germany. True, in the 1920s Germany strove to mend fences with France (Stresemann carried out the provisions of the Peace Treaty and was, in the language of his critics, an *Erfüllungspolitiker* (a compliance politician), and István Bethlen[26], Gyula Gömbös and many others at a very early

25 ■ Reference is to leading Hungarian Social Democrats. **Ernő Garami** (1876–1935) was best known abroad. In 1919 he distanced himself from the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and went into exile.
26 ■ **Count István Bethlen** (1874–1946), a conservative-liberal statesman; served as prime minister in 1921–1931. Carried out the consolidation of Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon. He oversaw the creation of a limited parliamentary system which—with certain minor distortions—survived to March 1944, when the country was occupied by the Germans.

stage formed an alliance with Germany. That hazardous notion was thus already present in the bud in the twenties. The politician and historian Gusztáv Gratz[27] censured Bethlen for this in a monograph which, although written as early as during the Second World War, remained unpublished for decades.[28] In other words, what remained of Hungary was put at risk in the hope of regaining the lost territories.

Russia could not be excluded from the circle of potential allies. (That is why Miklós Bánffy, Bethlen, Kálmán Kánya and some others toyed with the idea of officially proposing cooperation with Russia. However, in 1924, they could not even achieve the establishment of diplomatic relations. The relevant agreement was initialled but was not implemented. The government of Gyula Gömbös regularized relations in February 1934 but Hungary, between the two world wars —including the Social Democrats—could not imagine any such thing. Hungarian–Russian diplomatic relations were formal. In 1940 Pál Teleki[29] turned down Moscow's proposal to coordinate foreign policy in their dealings with Romania.

In 1927 Italy signed an impressive Treaty of Eternal Friendship[30] with Hungary, which was a tangible diplomatic achievement for Budapest. The age of diplomatic quarantine was over. Only a few years earlier, Hungary could not obtain membership of the League of Nations (at the first attempt in 1921, but only at the second in 1922). Years of untiring diplomatic effort were needed to secure a much-needed loan from the League of Nations. What Rome was interested in was not Hungary but the whole of the Danube Basin. Italy's regional approach weighed heavily on Hungarian–Italian relations at the time. For a long time, Italy maintained particularly cordial relations with Romania, and, for years, Mussolini sought good relations with Prague, too. Italy's national interest dictated such a foreign policy although Hungarian propaganda suggested otherwise.

There was an even bigger headache for Budapest: Italian–German relations were fraught with tension over a long period. Hungarian foreign policy had to walk a tightrope between Rome and Berlin, since it needed both of them for a

27 ■ **Gusztáv Gratz** (1875–1946), a conservative-liberal and legitimist politician. Served as finance minister in 1917. Minister to Austria in 1919–21. As President of the Ungarländischer Deutscher Volksbildungsverein he fought for the cultural rights of the German national minority in Hungary (with scant success) but discouraged the German dissimilation of Germans in Hungary.

28 ■ The manuscript only re-emerged and was published in 2001. Gusztáv Gratz, *Magyarország a két háború között* [Hungary between the Two World Wars]. Editing, annotations and afterword by Vince Paál. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

29 ■ **Count Pál Teleki** (1879–1941), conservative statesman; prime minister in 1920–21 and 1939–41; renowned geographer; lay the foundations of human geography in Hungary.

30 ■ As was customary in the era, the treaty was an agreement signed at a court of arbitration. In principle it involved the duty of mutual consultation but that soon fell into oblivion. It was a source of problems rather than a blessing that Mussolini promised to return weapons that had been taken during the First World War. When in 1929 at Szentgotthárd and in 1933 at Hirtenberg attempts were made to return Hungarian weapons, the Little Entente made a diplomatic scandal about them.

revision of the frontiers. As Mussolini wanted to block Berlin's access to the Danube Basin, he wanted a Rome-Vienna-Budapest political bloc. The makers of Hungarian foreign policy could not go along with that, as this would have antagonized Berlin. The Germans were aware of the danger. To avert it, in February 1934, they signed a second supplementary agreement to the ineffective German–Hungarian economic cooperation agreement of 1931 with Hungary. The supplementary agreement envisaged the German purchase of 50,000 tonnes of Hungarian grain. This German–Hungarian accord notwithstanding, Germany was disappointed to learn that minutes were nevertheless agreed in Rome.

Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös manoeuvred nimbly between the two great powers. He did not join a political bloc that may have lost him the goodwill of the Germans, but he made certain concessions to a mistrustful Mussolini. Italy agreed to purchase 320,000 tonnes of grain from Hungary, which indicated to the Germans that the 'price' of Hungarian sympathy was higher than their token gesture of a promise to buy 50,000 tonnes. What Gömbös accomplished was perhaps the most skilful tightrope walk between rival great powers in the history of Hungarian foreign policy in the 20th century. Moreover, he demonstrated Hungary's commitment to Austrian independence, something which Germany took note of. So Hungary played no part in Austria's loss of independence. Before the *Anschluss* in 1938, Mussolini looked to Hitler for support to bring his Abyssinian adventure to a bitterly successful close.

Claims made to this very day that Gömbös was solely to blame for Hungarian–German relations leading to a tragedy are, in this light, unhistorical. Rather, it was due to a Hungarian foreign policy based on an all-or-nothing gamble. But this *va banque* policy had its precursors, and additional factors complicate the story. For example, Gömbös maintained an unfriendly nationalist policy towards the country's ethnic Germans. And many continue to misinterpret his visit to Germany in 1933. Here is the background: two weeks before Gömbös met Hitler, Western democracies had initialled an agreement with Hitler and Mussolini paving the way for the Munich agreement of 1938. And let's not forget that István Bethlen had already visited Berlin three years before (Hitler was not in power then) putting Hungary's foot in the German camp.

Hungary's revisionist policy was unrealistic even between 1938 and 1941, when it achieved spectacular territorial gains and almost doubled its 1920 area. All this was a gift by a great power, obviously made for selfish reasons. Hungary paid for this with the catastrophe of the Second World War. And not only that: the hype linked to territorial gains further distorted the nation's knowledge of the international situation, which had never been sound.

There was a vast difference between the First Vienna Award of 2 November 1938 and the second one of 30 August 1940.[31] The first was tacitly recognized by the Western democracies. By the time of the second, a large part of France had been

occupied, Vichy France was dependent on Germany, and Great Britain, left to his own devices, was heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe. In a matter of a few days, on 5 September, Churchill declared in the House of Commons that Britain did not recognize the Second Vienna Award. It is commonly emphasized how dearly Hungary paid for the Second Vienna Award. However, a cost-benefit analysis does not suggest an exorbitant price. Hungary recovered territories the size of a country.

Few Hungarians noticed something far graver: Britain and Germany had become outright enemies. What Churchill said in Parliament on 5 September[32] was not his most solemn statement. By then the Second Vienna Award was a *fait accompli* anyway. More importantly, Hungary should have paid more attention to what Churchill also said, namely, that the fight that was under way was a struggle of life and death which the British Empire could not afford to lose.

Hungary and Yugoslavia signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship in December 1940. The document remains controversial for Hungarians to the present day. Hungary had meant to take that step independently, but it fitted German plans. Hitler overran Yugoslavia because the people of Belgrade, manipulated by the British Secret Service, toppled the Yugoslav government that had signed the Tripartite Pact. There was no German pressure on Hungary to join in the invasion. But a most attractive offer had been made—territorial gains—that Horthy found irresistible against his better judgement. Teleki and Bárdossy could not restrain him from giving a rash response. In sum, the German offer to Hungary created a dilemma which offered no solution.

Time resolves much—but much blood is spilt meantime. Technically, Hungary did not attack Yugoslavia; it waited for its disintegration. In April 1941 the Hungarian army entered territories that had been part of Hungary before 1918. Serbian troops had made far more serious provocations than what happened at Kassa (Košice) when, on 26 June 1941, aircraft unidentified to this day bombed it. Still, the Hungarian onslaught only began after Slavko Kvaternik, the Croatian *ustaša* leader, proclaimed the State of Croatia. That Croat state at the time became a German satellite. This was all the Croats obtained then. Real independence was only won in 1992.

But this was irrelevant compared with the crucial fact that Britain, which had been attacked by Germany, showed no tolerance whatsoever towards

31 ■ In the wake of Munich (September 1938), upon the failure of direct Hungarian–Czechoslovak talks, with Paris and London showing indifference and Berlin and Rome acting as referees, a territory of 12,000 km² and 1,050,000 inhabitants reverted to Hungary. (The Czechoslovak census of 1939 indicated that 57 per cent of the people involved in the decision were Hungarian-speaking, while the Hungarian census of 1941 put the figure at 84 per cent.) The Second Vienna Award was also the work of Berlin. As a result, northern Transylvania and Székelyföld (Székely Land) reverted to Hungary with an area of 43,000 km² and a population of 2.4 million (including one million Romanians. At the same time, 400,000 Hungarians remained in southern Transylvania).

32 ■ Churchill, as prime minister, unambiguously declared that Great Britain could not accept a decision imposed on Romania by force.

Hungary. Pál Teleki was the only member of the Hungarian establishment who understood that. An about-turn was beyond him. All he could do was to warn with his life[33] that there was no continuing along this road. The message of his last deed was that Hungary's fate was more important than the ethnic Hungarians in Yugoslavia. Although Miklós Horthy and László Bárdossy[34] understood the message, they did not alter the course that the Supreme Council of National Defence (which had still included Teleki) set on 1 April. After the war, Bárdossy was vilified, Teleki glorified. In fact, what Bárdossy did was 'merely' to proceed along a road marked out by Teleki earlier, at a time when the late prime minister's suicide had warned him not to continue.

The biggest mistake the regime committed at that time was to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941. Historians disagree in evaluating that move. Yet with decades of hindsight it seems certain that this criminally mistaken step should not have been taken at that time and in that way. Given the geopolitical situation and the commitment to Berlin—and public opinion sliding to the far right—involvement in the war could not be avoided. In June 1941, however, the revisionist trap did not force Hungary to take that step. The Germans did not apply direct pressure; they just a created a conducive 'atmosphere'.[35] Hitler, the mysterious sphinx, knew that sooner or later Hungary would get entangled in the war anyway. Hungary had some room for manoeuvre but, faced with the blinded military and a Horthy who lacked statesmanship, Bárdossy, a bureaucrat by nature, lacked the stamina to put up any resistance.

On the other hand, there was nothing in the often mentioned Molotov telegram[36] that was of use to Hungary in influencing the future. It was just a tactical move by a cornered Soviet Union. Bárdossy, for his part, committed a gross diplomatic error: he did not respond in the same courteous, tactical manner. No one with any empathy for the situation at the time would imagine that he suppressed that telegram. In the official Hungary of the time there was no reason to suppress such a document. Apart from personal responsibility for such a step, declaring war on the Soviet Union originated from the essence of official Hungary of the time. It was an anti-democratic move, one that did serious harm to the Hungarian national interest.

33 ■ Prime Minister Pál Teleki committed suicide at dawn on 3 April 1941. Most likely because on the day before Hungary's Minister to Great Britain, György Barcza had informed him in a telegram that in the given situation Britain categorically rejected the Hungarian plan to re-annex Yugoslav territories that had belonged to Hungary prior to 1918.

34 ■ **László Bárdossy** (1890–1946), diplomat, Foreign Minister after 1940. Served as Prime Minister after Teleki's death. Was condemned to death as a war criminal and executed in Budapest in 1946.

35 ■ The expression was used by László Bárdossy in his testimonial during his trial before a postwar people's tribunal.

36 ■ At a time when the Soviet Union was in a tight corner, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov sent a message to Hungary through the Hungarian minister on 23 June 1941. He said that Moscow showed understanding for Hungary's territorial claims against Romania.

Horthy in the first place (wrongly) treated the Košice incident as a provocation that called for war, and Bárdossy's cabinet followed suit. That was the last fatal step along the road to the German occupation in March 1944. Given the slippery slope of that historical situation, there was practically no way to avoid declaring war also on the UK and the US[37]. Any facetious comment on the absurdity of that is out of place.

Miklós Kállay[38] never had a "shuttlecock policy" nor did he "attempt to make a separate peace". Indeed, he tried to establish contacts with Britain and America in the stubborn belief that they were ready to come to an agreement without prior consultation with their Soviet Ally. They were not. Cohesion was much stronger amongst the Allies than dissension. Britain and America avoided any move behind Moscow's back, the more so because they knew the Soviets would have promptly learnt about it anyway. It was clear that, given Hungary's political position, it was within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. The US accepted this, and was even ready to counter any British attempts that would endanger such an arrangement. It was wary of Britain's record in world politics and wished to open a new chapter after the war. This further narrowed the Kállay government's small room for manoeuvre.

As a consequence, the preliminary armistice agreement of September 1943, as brokered by the British, was in actual fact an agreement with the Anti-Fascist Coalition. As it turned out, that agreement came to nothing.

On 15 October Horthy's attempt to sign an armistice agreement with the Soviets was foiled by the Germans. The underlying cause of his failure was his absolutely mistaken decision to go to Klessheim and approve the German occupation of Hungary.[39] By October 1944 Hungary's law enforcement authorities had become incapable of implementing Horthy's decisions. The events proved his distrust in Germans. The problem was he prepared his break with the Germans unskilfully, so his attempt was bound to fail.

In 1945—the start of a new chapter in Hungary's history—the leaders were right to acknowledge the 'new Trianon Treaty'[40] as largely inevitable. Illusions resurfaced on both sides of the political divide. On the Left, many thought that Moscow promoted Hungarian national interests effectively when in fact Moscow sought to punish rather than help. Adherents to the West trusted that

37 ■ Acting under Soviet pressure in November 1941 Great Britain sent an ultimatum to Hungary that this country could not accept. Consequently, by December the two countries were in a state of war with one another. A few days later, when Hitler declared war on the United States, Bárdossy, acting under German and Italian pressure, also declared war on the USA.

38 ■ **Miklós Kállay** (1887–1967), prime minister between 1942 and the German occupation.

39 ■ On 15 March 1944 Adolf Hitler summoned Regent Horthy to Klessheim (near Salzburg), to obtain his agreement for the occupation of the country.

40 ■ The Peace Treaty that Hungary signed in February 1947, contrary to wartime US and UK plans, repeated the 1920 decisions. With reference to the geostrategic vulnerability of Bratislava, three additional Hungarian-inhabited villages were annexed by the newly established Czechoslovakia.

Western democracies would stand up for Hungarian interests. Yet even before the Cold War began the reality of handling a bipolar world took precedence.

Meanwhile many harboured the emotionally charged belief that the Western powers had sold Hungary down the river to the Kremlin in Yalta. But this was wrong: decisions had already been made at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. (When Britain abandoned its plan to land in the Balkans, it more or less forfeited its influence on events in Central Europe.)

Hungary was barely able to assert its national interests until 1956. Until 1953 its foreign policy was almost nonexistent and was nominal thereafter.

The 1956 Revolution was ill-fated from the start, even if illusions had been widely cherished[41]. And yet the heroes of that popular uprising did more for the Hungarian national interest than anyone else in the 20th century. Views diverged, but on one thing there was agreement: the repressive regime and Moscow's dominance must cease. The decision to wage a war of independence, crushed as it was, served the nation's interests too.

The 33-year intervallum between 1956 and 1989 had been and gone. But it is still too early to offer a comprehensive assessment[42] of those decades. Many Hungarians are disappointed about the democratic period since, and this clouds their view of the preceding period. And historians in any case require a longer perspective. What is clear, however, is the legacy of 1956: János Kádár's Hungary was liveable and the transition in 1989 bloodless.

One common view is that Kádár's regime secured more independence in domestic policy by toeing Moscow's foreign-policy line unswervingly. New evidence suggests a more nuanced view. Nevertheless, we should keep a key principle in mind: nuances don't alter the big picture. Hungary was dwarfed by Moscow. Let's not forget the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968,[43] a painful dilemma for Kádár. Involuntary as Hungary's participation was in that multinational operation, Kádár hurt the nation's interests.

We now know that party leaders argued fiercely behind closed doors on how to represent the interests of ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries. The Kádár regime was, by and large, unable to stand up for the interests of all Hungarians. It lacked the courage to walk the narrow path which might have better protected Hungarians living beyond the border. Only the transition of 1989–90 ushered in a foreign policy that took *all* Hungarians into account.

41 ■ Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt.* Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006.

42 ■ There is however genuine need for the publication of historical source works and analyses of partial aspects of that period as they can lay the groundwork for future sound and comprehensive evaluations.

43 ■ On 20 August 1968, the Soviet Union, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria carried out an armed intervention in Czechoslovakia to put an end to the political process (allegedly: "counter-revolutionary") that had started there earlier that year.

Hungary's transition of 1989–90 was part of the transformation of the whole region and was closely linked to the fall of Soviet communism. Yalta's iron hand had ruled for decades. Now it went limp with startling suddenness as the bipolar order, marking international relations almost ever since the end of the Second World War, collapsed. The period 1990–91 was momentous: Soviet troops withdrew from Hungary, the Warsaw Pact and COMECON dissolved, the Soviet Union disintegrated, Czechoslovakia became Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and a protracted civil war followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

These momentous changes had a fundamental impact on the course of Hungarian foreign policy. Although successive Hungarian governments were at odds politically, foreign policy consistently rested on three pillars. First, instead of looking to the east, Hungary began looking to the West and restored all severed links with Western states (not to mention joining NATO and the EU). Second, Hungary began exploring and making use of cooperation with its neighbours and other countries of the region. Finally, it took the fate of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries far more seriously than before. Still there were, of course, some differences. The Socialist–Free Democrat coalition subordinated the Diaspora to Hungary's strategic commitments to NATO and the EU. József Antall and then Viktor Orbán saw the Hungarian minority as a part of the nation regardless of domicile and Hungary's EU membership did not take precedence.

After the transition of 1989–90, many Hungarians harboured illusions about the future. They believed that Hungary's membership of NATO and the EU would happen overnight and that Hungary's return to capitalism would automatically bring the high living standards of welfare states. By contrast, about a third of the population became worse off and another roughly third of the population suffered relative losses in their living standards. Still, the course of foreign policy shaped in 1990 has retained the support of most Hungarians to the present day.

And the two exceptional events—Hungary's joining NATO in March 1999 after nearly 15 years of hard work, and the EU in May 2004—tells its own story: in the referendums on both, votes in favour far outnumbered those against; but turnout was low. Fifty-one per cent of eligible voters abstained in the first referendum and 54 per cent did so in the second. You could put it this way: the entity of the nation voted yes but the entities comprising it—the people—didn't. Hungary's future is bound up with the efficacy of its foreign policy. But the gap between people and nation needs to be tangibly reduced if its foreign policy is to succeed in the future. ❧

László Borhi

In the Power Arena

US–Hungarian Relations 1942–1989

Miklós Kállay's breakaway policy 1942–1944

American documents show that between 1941 and 1989 Hungary was at the mercy of the Great Powers and their struggle for hegemony in Europe. Hungary was far from being an independent actor on the international stage. The United States wanted European stability, and its manoeuvres in Eastern Europe sought this aim. Stability might be won by advancing the cause of national independence. Here, America might try to put an end to Soviet occupation. At other times, national sovereignty rubbed up against the need for stability, and the US accepted the status quo. Hungary had a say on minor issues of national interest, thus procuring resources abroad to sustain economic life and development, or supporting Hungarian minorities beyond its border. But national independence or sovereignty was clearly not in Hungary's gift. So when it comes to passing judgement on Hungarian foreign policy, we must consider whether its policymakers had the ability to acquire the same freedom to manoeuvre as other powers operating in the same sphere of influence.

Miklós Kállay's policy of breaking away from the Axis between 1942 and 1944 and United States war aims illustrate the relationship between national foreign policy, national interest and power politics. Conventional wisdom had it that Hungary's foreign policy hinged on breaking away from Germany in the Second World War.[1] The moral unacceptability of its German alliance and Hungary's attendant road to downfall fuelled the premise that sheer determination could have speeded up a breakaway, thereby improving Hungary's

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postwar position and buttressing the potential peace dividend—always assuming the Allies' motives were altruistic and converged around the international public good (Germany's defeat) and Hungary's best interests. But was a breakaway policy in fact in Hungary's national interest? The Americans and British had no intention of occupying the Danube valley. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry knew this in December 1943. And the Allies had promised nothing in return for Hungary's secret intelligence or a prospective breakaway from the Axis. Meanwhile, the grave threat of German occupation, in light of what happened to Italy, was a very real risk.[2]

As so often in Hungary's history, the Western-friendly Hungarian elite portrayed the country as the "protective bastion against bolshevism". This was poor substitute for a foreign policy which must respond to external challenges. The US had never had interests in Central Europe. And its goals could only be formulated in negative terms: it was not in the US interest to see the country turn Bolshevik. American documents show that Hungary's possible breakaway policy was of interest to the US and Britain: the need to occupy Hungary (as well as Romania and Bulgaria) would mean the withdrawal of German troops facing a prospective Second Front and a landing in the West. The papers of Averell Harriman, US Ambassador to Moscow, reveal that Hitler's small allies were to be detached from the Axis in order to relieve the Western theatre of war: "The enemy will do its utmost to hold South East Europe... It should be possible to contain German forces in the Balkans. Germany's armed forces are dangerously overstreched by current operations and provided we can induce her to retain surplus forces in Scandinavia, Italy, the Balkans, she will find it difficult simultaneously to provide forces for Russia, France and the Low Countries. The attitude of the neutrals and the satellites may move further in favour of the Allies compelling Germany to dispose reserves to meet unfavourable developments." Moscow was well aware of the significance of detaching the satellites at the price of their German invasion: "Germany's 'victory' over its unfortunate allies does not in the final analysis solve Germany's difficulties, but on the contrary, increases them. Additional transfer of German troops to the territories of its occupied 'Allies' further weaken the already thin German reserves in the West. Thereby the possibilities for a blow at the common enemy from the West becomes more favourable."[3]

On November 2, 1943, William D. Leahy, on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressed a protocol to Freeman Matthews, head of the US State Department's Europe Office. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff", he wrote, "are of the opinion that from a military standpoint the Allied cause would be advanced by the withdrawal of either or both of these countries [Romanian and Hungary] from the war, regardless of whether or not such action would be likely to entail full German occupation of these countries."[4] Allen Dulles, then the head of US intelligence based in Switzerland, received orders the next day from "Wild" Bill

Donovan, OSS (the CIA's predecessor) chief to examine the possibility of Hungary leaving the Axis. Donovan insisted that Kállay and his regime had hitherto received equivocal guidance. But now, he told Dulles for his personal information, the chiefs of staff had approved severing Hungary and the other satellites from the Axis. Assistant Secretary of State Adolph Berle was briefed on the decision and informed his men accordingly.[5] Secretary of State Hull sent a circular telegram on November 18 to American envoys in neutral states informing them about the new policy.

Ready to surrender

My research in the US revealed that the Hungarian leadership was ready to surrender to the western Allies. There was no insistence on bargaining. On December 18, 1943, Miklós Horthy Jr sent a letter to Berne stating that if the western Allies expected Hungary to capitulate, he would make sure that it happened. George Ghika, the Romanian diplomat who acted as an intermediary, also conveyed the message that Budapest only awaited the nod from the Allies.[6] The US had no doubt about the sincerity of Kállay and his group. Their breakaway policy was based on the expectation of an Allied occupation and the avoidance of a German one. However, a genuine fear was that a separate peace would lead to a German invasion. Occupation by the western Allies, however, was not a realistic option. Even in the best of cases, the Danube valley could only be a secondary target.[7] Washington and London had taken into account that should Hungary break away from the Axis it would be occupied by the Germans. For military reasons, they would even go as far as provoking such an outcome regardless of the consequences. Although no causal relationship can be discerned between the negotiated British-American make-jump policy (supported also by Moscow) and the German occupation (March 19, 1944), it appears all but certain that Hitler's decision was influenced by the fear of a Hungarian breakaway.

The armistice conditions offered by the US in the event of Hungary's withdrawal from the war were more severe than those Hungary eventually agreed to in January 1945: indefinite occupation "administered by a military government supervised by the Allies," taking orders from an Allied or Soviet supreme commander; diplomatic relations to be supervised by the occupying authorities; and "occupied territories" to be vacated without any bearing on the final settlement of the future of the disputed areas in question.[8]

No responsible US official made any commitment at any time to giving Hungary favourable treatment in the event of a withdrawal from the war. Washington even refused to take into account Hungary's request to be classed among countries to be liberated rather than countries to be occupied, in return for secret intelligence and a possible withdrawal.

On September 14, 1943, a meeting took place in Lisbon between the US military attaché and Counsellor Sándor Hollán. Before the meeting, the US attaché consulted George F. Kennan, Washington's Minister in Lisbon, who was considered in the US as an authority on Soviet and German affairs. They agreed to meet Hollán on condition that he answered questions of a military and political nature and expected no promises from the US. Further, the issue of a Habsburg restoration must not be raised at all. Hollán stated that Hungary wanted to break away from the Axis as soon as possible and he implied that the Hungarian army was ready to cooperate with the Allied forces once they came into conceivable proximity.[9]

The policy of striking a separate peace with the western Allies, which brought the risk of German occupation—hence a major risk for Hungarians—did not promise the satisfaction of any other national goal such as retaining territories won, better conditions of surrender or the avoidance of Soviet occupation. The ultimate goal—and a national interest which time did nothing to change—was to avoid German occupation.

This was the goal that Miklós Kállay and his group kept at the forefront of their minds. Pushing for a breakaway policy should therefore not have been given absolute priority, despite strong pressure from the western Allies (though the race with Hungary's neighbours for a favourable position at the peace conference and the desire to avoid another Trianon mattered). As an alternative, a continued meeting of German economic demands could have been coupled with a policy of playing for time. Of course, it is not certain that a German occupation would have been avoided. But at least Hungarian foreign policy would have given an adequate response to the foreign policy challenges of a nearly hopeless era. Washington did, to some extent, sympathize with the Hungarian dilemma. As the Office of Strategic Services saw it, Kállay's dilemma was the following: Hungary has "but one hope of national survival: to strike some sort of a bargain with the Allies which will enable them to abandon the war and yet retain some measure of independence, and to do this neither too soon, to provoke German occupation nor too late, to exhaust Allied patience."[10]

The Americans quickly forgot all about the absence of a Hungarian breakaway policy. They did not resent Hungary for failing to take such a suicidal step, but they did censure the country for assistance in the deportations.

The Hungarian question in the United Nations 1957–1963

It is not always a drawback if a Great Power manages to impose its will on a small country. Take, for instance, Hungarian–US relations from 1957 to 1963. The UN had proven itself incapable of preventing the Soviet invasion of November 4, 1956. Nor had it been able to curb retaliation. But they did have

the opportunity to pressure the Kádár regime into easing the situation at home. On November 8, 1956, the mandate inspection committee of the UN, prompted by the US, proposed that the decision on granting Hungarian credentials should be postponed. This was accepted by the Assembly. Moreover, on January 10, 1957, a five-member committee was set up to study the Hungarian question and to ensure that UN observers were allowed to enter Hungary.

All this questioned the international sovereignty of the Hungarian government and Kádár put efforts to resolve this troubling situation at the centre of his foreign policy. Washington demanded a high price, however: stop prosecuting fifty-sixers and proclaim an amnesty for revolutionary activities.[11] The Kádár regime eventually gave in and announced the amnesty (1963)—later seen as a historical milestone—in response to American pressure, in the interest of taking the Hungarian question off the agenda. This can be regarded as US diplomacy's first success behind the Iron Curtain.

On February 21, 1961 officials of the US State Department urged the United States' UN mission to dispense with the Hungarian question as quickly as possible so that the United States could build contacts with the Hungarian people. A way had to be found of closing the Hungarian problem at the UN's 15th General Assembly.[12] The backdrop to this turn of events was the Kennedy administration's promotion of "peaceful engagement" with Eastern Europe, which replaced the previous policy of isolation. But, if truth be told, interest in the Hungarian question had waned as well.

The Hungarian leadership had hoped that Washington would remove the Hungarian issue from the UN agenda in return for resolving the situation of Cardinal József Mindszenty, who had sought refuge at the US Legation on November 4, 1956. But hope was in vain. In April 1961 Hungary was told that no settlement in Hungarian–US relations was on offer without a "satisfactory solution" to the Hungarian question. On August 3, Deputy Secretary of State Richard H. Davis read out a note to the Hungarian Chargé d'Affaires Károly Hackler, in which he conveyed the US "desire" that a planned visit to Hungary by Frederick Boland, the president of the UN Assembly, should result in a general amnesty which would mean freeing all political prisoners. Davis hinted that should there be a favourable response the Hungarian question might be dropped. On the orders of State Secretary Dean Rusk, the Hungarians were informed that they must take considerable and tangible steps in order to improve their situation in the UN and to solve the Hungarian question. An amnesty for those imprisoned due to the events of 1956 would substantially contribute to this aim. They tried to make it sound less like conditions and more like "genuine, realistic proposals".[13] However, the Hungarian leadership, caught in a vice, did not jump at the opportunity: Kádár considered the proposal to be interference in Hungary's domestic politics. Soviet–US tension, which had risen on the back of the Cuban crisis, may have contributed to the fact that no steps

were taken. Then Washington began to support the discussion of the Hungarian question at the UN with new zeal, as this was a way of putting pressure on Moscow. When in 1962 János Radványi, the Washington chargé d'affaires, tried to convince Chester Bowles, the president's special envoy, that a general amnesty was Hungary's internal affair, Bowles insisted that "1956 is not an internal problem".[14] Rusk said it was only after an amnesty for fifty-sixers that any US–Hungarian negotiations could take place, followed by an exchange of envoys and their elevation to the ambassadorial rank.[15]

Moving out of deadlock

Kádár now indicated that Hungary was interested in normalizing bilateral relations as a part of his agenda to open up Hungary to the West. In January 1962, the State Department again insisted that Hungarian–US relations could only be settled, and Hungary's position in the UN resolved positively, if Hungary changed its domestic policy in a way that persuaded US legislators and the general public. The State Department considered an announcement that no one is imprisoned any longer in connection with 1956[16] to be something that carried the necessary weight.

After the Kádár government's 1960 partial amnesty such a feat appeared a little less impossible. There is no doubt, however, that the US proposal, which they later tried to pass as advice, would have infringed sovereignty had Hungary been a sovereign state. Deputy Foreign Minister Péter Mód, addressing the UN, accused the Americans of setting amnesty as a condition to improving relations between the two countries. US diplomacy hastened to reply that it was a misunderstanding on the Hungarian government's part to interpret the amnesty as a condition, as that would have meant interfering with Hungary's domestic affairs.

Looking for a way out, the State Department declared there was need for "some kind of measure of a theatrical nature, but it did not dare to use the word amnesty, as that would have been regarded as intrusion into Hungary's domestic affairs." Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs George C. McGhee confirmed that the Hungarian government must make a gesture which clearly documented that the events of 1956 were to be "regarded closed once and for all." He added that on the Americans' part, this was "not a condition or a request, but a suggestion."[17]

To avoid any further misunderstanding, the Washington chargé d'affaires, János Radványi, mentioned the original English "suggestion" yet he described the American statement as interference in domestic affairs. At the same time, however, he recognized that Hungarian foreign policy was not flush with choices. The Foreign Ministry took "a deliberating stance."[18] This time the US took the initiative. At informal talks with Dénes Polgár, the Washington

correspondent of MTI, the Hungarian news agency, they repeated their earlier position. After a "self-initiated" amnesty, they would remove the Hungarian question from the UN agenda and would, for general satisfaction, resolve such questions as establishing commercial and cultural ties and the Mindszenty issue. At the same time, as if they had read the mind of Hungarian leadership, the State Department warned that normalization was only possible if the US took the Hungarian issue off the agenda. Should the problem somehow "wane" in the UN, this would not happen. They also made it clear that Hungary must make the next move.[19] In response, the Foreign Ministry indicated that Hungary was ready to take any step of a domestic political nature in order to improve its situation in the UN, and it would meet US conditions for improving relations. It admitted that "psychologically, Hungary cannot afford to sacrifice its pride and self-esteem by giving in to pressure". It went on to say that the Americans were mistaken if they thought that the Soviet Union continued to have a decisive influence on the politics of its allies—the decision regarding the amnesty was in the hands of the Hungarian leadership.[20] Contrary to this, the US minister believed that Hungary's independence was at best nominal, and Kádár, referred to as a successful funambulist, had little leeway. In line with a resolution by the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, Radványi got orders to start putting out feelers after consultations with Anatoly Dobrinin, the Soviet ambassador to Washington. Dobrinin agreed with the principle and practice of the procedure.[21]

Steps towards a settlement

In August 1962, a group of Hungarian émigrés protested against what they thought was the Americans' decision to take the Hungarian question off the agenda.[22] Austrian Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky tried to convince State Secretary Rusk that the Hungarians were ready to take action if no external pressure was applied.[23] Harold Vedeler, head of the Division of Eastern European Affairs at the State Department, told Chargé d'Affaires Radványi that if the Hungarian government implements the amnesty, the Americans will take steps to remove the Hungarian question. Deputy Secretary of State Richard H. Davis handed over "a written document"—which was pointedly not a diplomatic note—stating the US conditions. In order to prevent the appearance of an intrusion in domestic affairs, the insistence on an amnesty was worded as a hope that the Hungarian government, on its own initiative, will free any persons who would still be imprisoned in Hungary because of their participation in the events of 1956, and that they will make this public. If this was the case, Washington would support the elimination of Hungary's unfavourable situation in the UN. At the same time, the US would issue a statement calling attention to the change of situation in Hungary, and would

confirm that further discussion of the Hungarian question did not aid progress. Davis handed Radványi the document for "his own perusal" as the "text of the official statement". At his government's request, he in turn showed the document to Dobrinin, who conveyed his "personal opinion" that if Hungary "has already made a decision to take certain steps in domestic politics, we [the Soviet Union] can only agree".[24] Khrushchev told Kádár that he did not think the American wording unacceptable,[25] and, later, at the Eighth Congress of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, it was announced that 95 per cent of people convicted for "counter-revolutionary crimes" were already out of prison. However, the Americans were not satisfied. At the end of November, Harold Vedeler travelled to Budapest to hold talks with foreign affairs officials. There it was explained that, as a small country, Hungary would suffer difficulties if it gave the appearance of surrendering to external pressure. At the same time, the Hungarians signalled that they understood the situation, and added, in reference to a remark by Kádár, that the Presidential Council would review the cases of the remaining five per cent of political prisoners.[26] Péter Mód said that his government was working on the issue of amnesty, which, in the end, they declared in March 1963.[27]

However, Washington still deemed the steps taken by the Hungarian leadership to be insufficient. It declared the controversial mission of UN Special Envoy Sir Leslie Munro as completed and referred his duties back to the authority of the UN General Secretary. But it still proposed withholding approval of Hungary's credentials. This almost entirely bypassed the mandate examining commission—the case rested on the Greek delegate passing it against his government's orders—and thus the Hungarian credentials were "only" passed on for approval at a UN extraordinary assembly in May. The Hungarian question was taken off the agenda at the end of the year.

The 1970s: US loans

At the beginning of the 1960s, first the Kennedy and then, more pointedly, the Johnson administration declared the earlier general policy of undermining Eastern-European regimes to have been a mistake. By then US policy was not aiming to topple or destabilize these regimes but to consolidate them. The aim, just as in the 1950s, was to strengthen European security, on the understanding that the Soviet Union would continue its presence in Eastern Europe.

From the mid-1960s it appears that the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe was no longer regarded as running contrary to European stability. What is more, it was said that a post-Soviet Eastern Europe would be more likely to destabilize the continent due to the fear of the return of German influence and the potential re-emergence of nationalist conflicts between some of the states. The State Department believed that Eastern Europe could be a source of

danger: "Unbridled nationalism in Eastern Europe might lead to possible renewal of the patterns of conflict that made the area such a cockpit prior to *pax communista.* This potential is evident in the complex of latent and potentially dangerous territorial and minority issues in the area." It was raised that the reunification of the continent was not necessarily desirable, as "the futile past could return".[28]

From the 1970s, US diplomats started saying more frequently that the United States did not want to disrupt the relationship between the satellite states and the Soviet Union. In 1971, US Ambassador in Budapest Alfred Puhan told American émigrés that Hungary's only hope of freedom was change in the Soviet Union itself. Furthermore, in the 1970s they were already talking about changes needed in the nature of Soviet occupation to avoid a third world war. "Our policy must aim at a Finlandization of Eastern Europe," Helmut Sonnefeldt, the advisor in Eastern European affairs to the Nixon administration, said in the mid-1970s. One example he mentioned was the Polish–Soviet modus vivendi and Hungary, where Kádár "has found ways which are acceptable to the Soviet Union, correspond with the natural strives of the people, grow Hungarian roots."[29] Stability and the restoration of national independence had by then become mutually exclusive conditions.

However, politics is not decided at the drawing table. Some aspects of the bridging policy proclaimed by Johnson and then Nixon—loans and cultural ties—were, like it or not, undermining the foundations of the Hungarian regime. From the middle of the 1990s economic relations between the US and Hungary were developing fast. From Hungary's point of view, the US's role as a lender was crucial. In the end, however, this is what created the Kádár regime's debt trap, which eventually led to its end. Officially, the aim of the lending policy was to transform the command economy, but its undesired consequence became Hungary's bankruptcy.

At the expense of domestic political reforms, Kádár secured foreign loans necessary to keep the system ticking: in the 1970s, the State Department believed that Hungarian reforms served "the national interests" of the US. Initially they tried to keep the consequences of the American open-doors policy in check, but the machine, slowly setting into motion, was hard to control. Normalization of relations with the US was unavoidable if Kádár's economic reform was to succeed, as this was the gateway to international capital markets, products and technologies. János Fekete, Vice President of the National Bank of Hungary, said in 1975 that US banks were taking on ever larger roles in financing Hungary's imports and lending operations despite existing limitations. Besides the oil-producing Arab states, Hungary regarded the United States as "one of its main creditors, with a growing importance" on money markets "prone to suffer restrictions".[30] This is why closer economic relations were sought. But this could not be achieved

in isolation: American cultural penetration had to be let in alongside American capital. Because of the great need for foreign loans the time had come for the Communist regime to lay aside its reservations and make a truce with the Americans for the sake of most favoured nation treatment (1978).

Repatriation of the Holy Crown
January 5, 1978

In 1945 the Crown Guard prevented Hungary's Holy Crown from being seized by the Soviets by taking it out of the country and handing it over to US occupying forces in Austria. Its return was demanded as early as August 1946. However, US Minister Arthur Schoenfeld was told that Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy would prefer the regalia to be temporarily left in US care. He was fearful of what the attitude of the Allied Control Commission headed by the Soviet Union might be and was alarmed by press reports that Czechoslovakia demanded the crown jewels be placed in a "UN museum". After the Communist takeover, the Foreign Ministry officially requested the Holy Crown's repatriation, but the Americans said they would not negotiate a return, and even refused to place it in the hands of the Vatican.

The Crown's situation came up again with the release of a US businessman, Robert Vogeler, who was arrested in 1949. The Americans said the crown jewels were not a bargaining chip as they were not removed by force from Hungary but given to the American authorities for safekeeping, and they are being kept as a special-status property. In Hungary's view, the Crown was the property of the Hungarian state so no one may entrust it to anybody nor can anyone exercise custody over it against the will of the People's Republic of Hungary".[31]

Domestic politics too had their part to play in the fact that the Americans refused to move from their entrenched position. Not only some US Hungarian émigré groups, but Americans of Eastern-European origin also vehemently opposed handing the Holy Crown to the Kádár regime arguing that this act would legitimize the Communist system. In an article published on April 14, 1970, *The New York Times* broached the subject, claiming that the day was perhaps near when Washington would find an opportunity for returning Hungary's national treasure. The article created a huge uproar in Congress and the State Department was forced to reassure Béla Varga, former parliamentary speaker, that they had no plans at the moment to return the Crown.[32]

Cardinal József Mindszenty, who meanwhile regained his freedom, kept the crown affair on the agenda. On October 26, 1972, he wrote a letter to President Nixon (with a copy sent to Secretary of State Kissinger), expressing concern over the possible return of the Crown to Hungary ("to these followers of Satan") and he proposed that it and the regalia should be turned over to the

Vatican. The State Department reassured the Cardinal that the Crown's return was not on the agenda, but it also left no doubt that, "as the property of the Hungarian nation" it could only be repatriated to Hungary.

In an official communiqué dated March 16, 1973, the State Department, contrary to its earlier position, said the return of the Crown depended on a general improvement in Hungarian–US relations.[33] This meant that the problem could no longer be swept under the carpet and the US government must sooner or later take a stance. In 1975, the year of the signing of the Helsinki Treaty and the peak of the thaw, the US Embassy in Budapest considered the time ripe for reviewing the Crown's status. The initiative was in some ways "grass-roots", as it was the staff of the embassy who reported on the changes in Hungarian domestic politics from the closest angle, including the possible response to them. Some American Ambassadors in Budapest, mainly Alfred Puhan and Philip Kaiser, were sympathetic, not only to the country, but to some extent to the reform wing of the leadership as well, and they urged the return of the regalia.

New Eastern-Europe policy

The Carter administration's renewed Eastern-Europe policy (1977) gave a new lift to the course of events. Washington redefined as its Eastern-European interest the forging of long-term relations between the West and the region, along with the improvement in the situation of the local community. In addition, they wished to limit the Soviet Union's ability to use the region to serve adverse aims.[34] Congress was divided on the issue, but the legislators siding with repatriation were not only more numerous but also had more influence than those opposing it. The position of the State Department had become clear by 1977. In the view of William Luers, the assistant secretary of state for Europe, if the United States could do nothing else to help Hungary, the least it could do was to return the Crown.[35] The decision was all the easier to make after Ferenc Nagy sided with repatriation, too.[36]

At a meeting convened by President Carter on July 15, 1977, the President himself decided in favour of repatriation, despite the fact that, in his words, the Pope "had not felt the time was ripe".[37] Secretary of State Cyrus Vance justified the decision by emphasizing that Hungary had made every effort to settle its debts, bilateral trade had flourished and the two countries had signed an agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation. Media coverage of the US was satisfactory and leading Hungarian politicians received embassy officials regularly: in most cases, earlier problems had been resolved. Although the Kádár regime could not be called democratic, in the areas of human rights, cultural pluralism and socialist welfare, it was far ahead of other Warsaw Pact states. The same could be said, at least according to Vance, of church–state

relations. What is more, the Hungarian Catholic Church had pledged support for the repatriation of the Crown (though the political pressure applied was a question not dwelt on).[38]

Finally Carter, in July 1977, told Helmut Schmidt, the West Germany Chancellor—who had met with János Kádár just a few days before—that despite "domestic political difficulties", protest from US Hungarian émigrés and "other sympathizing circles", the Holy Crown was to be returned to Hungary. It was bruited about that Carter had even planned to invite Kádár to Washington.[39]

After the July 15 decision it seemed that the handover ceremony could take place before the opening of the Belgrade Conference (September 15, 1977). At least this is what Cyrus Vance had proposed to the President, so that the good news could be delivered to the Hungarians with the presentation of credentials by the newly appointed ambassador, Philip Kaiser. The Secretary of State argued that the Hungarians had accepted all the conditions set by the US: "all segments of society" should be invited to attend the handover ceremony and the Crown should be on public display and treated with the "respect" it deserved.[40] But Pál Losonczi, the Chairman of the Presidential Council, unexpectedly received Kaiser already on August 4, a week earlier than expected. By that date, the President had not yet accepted Vance's proposal on a final approval, despite the Ambassador's nudging.[41] On August 17, Kaiser was informed that Carter—on the counsel of his National Security Advisor Brzezinski—had postponed or even withdrawn the final decision, so that the question could be examined as a whole in the context of the United States' Eastern Europe strategy. Thus Kaiser was given the sensitive diplomatic task of putting out feelers at the very highest level—without being able to make any promises for the repatriation—as to what the Hungarian leadership had in mind in the way of displaying the Crown.[42]

In line with his mission, Philip Kaiser told János Nagy, deputy minister for foreign affairs, on August 18 that "the affair has reached the final stage of decision-making". Kaiser outlined the conditions of—the officially still unapproved—repatriation. The receiving delegation must reflect the fact that "the Crown is returned to the Hungarian people by the American people". Further, referring to the US domestic situation, the Hungarians must declare in what manner they planned to display it and the regalia making them accessible to the public.[43] Hungary assumed full responsibility in this respect. Ambassador Kaiser received a statement from Nagy that Budapest "will give the Crown the dignified reception it deserves as a national relic" and that all strata of Hungarian society would welcome the repatriation of the Crown to Hungary". The final decision on returning the Crown came on September 13, with the sole condition that it should be put it on public display.[44] Secretary of State Vance conveyed the news to Foreign Minister Frigyes Puja at a

session of the UN on October 1. The only remaining question was "when and how" the handover should take place. Vance asked his Hungarian colleague to keep the decision secret.[45]

The decision to return the Crown was officially announced in Washington on November 4, 1977, on the anniversary of the Soviet army's return to crush the 1956 Revolution. The announcement was made on this sad day because the congressional representative for Cleveland, Mary Oaker, an outspoken opponent of returning the Crown to Hungary, got wind of it and protested in an open letter to the President that day.[46] In the meantime, the negotiations on the details got under way between Kaiser and Nagy. On December 16 they issued a joint statement. It did not include a set date and the Hungarian party leadership probably banned its publication out of caution. On January 5, 1978, the Crown returned to Hungarian soil. A 200-member 'organized crowd' attended the reception ceremony where Hungarian Church leaders were also present. Kádár himself did not wish to attend, though the Americans had also asked him to stay away. Negotiations continued until the very last minute. Washington wanted to include a clause saying the Crown cannot be taken to Moscow. Although based on a Hungarian–US agreement, journalists were free to report the events, the reporters of media declared to be "fascist" by the top leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were denied an entry visa. The domestic press received guidance, which prescribed that the United States could not be blamed for being late in repatriating the Crown, but should not stress the event's importance. They gave specific instructions as to the space which each daily newspaper could give to the item.[47]

The Holy Crown, symbolic of Hungary's thousand-year past, became a museum exhibit. Its repatriation was a signal that the United States had acknowledged the realities of Europe's power structure. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Gyula Juhász ed., *Magyar–brit titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* [1943 Secret Negotiations Between Hungary and the UK]. Budapest: Kossuth, 1978; Péter Sipos and István Vida, "The Policy of the United States towards Hungary During the Second World War". *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29 (1989) 1. pp. 79–110.

2 ■ On the issue whether leaving the Axis was in the national interest, see András Joó, *Kállay Miklós külpolitikája – Magyarország és a háborús diplomácia 1942–1944* [Kállay's Foreign Policy—Hungary and Wartime Diplomacy 1942–1944]. Budapest: Napvilág, 2008.

3 ■ "Overall Deception Policy for War with Germany", n. d. [December 1943]. Library of Congress, Averell Harriman Papers, Box 171.

4 ■ Quoted in: Memorandum by Cordell Hull to Admiral William Leahy, March 16, 1944. NARA, RG 218 JCS, Geographical Files 42–45, Box 191. A brief reference in Sipos–Vida, op. cit. p. 90.

5 ■ Memorandum for Allen Dulles, November 3 [1943]. Allen Dulles Papers, Seely Mudd Library, Princeton, PDF file, 1943021100003537.

6 ■ Memorandum by Jackson to Dulles, December 18, 1943. Allen Dulles Papers, Seely Mudd Library, Princeton.

7 ■ The First Plenary Meeting, November 28, 1943. Bohlen's note. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), The Conferences at Cairo and Teheran, 1943, p. 493.

8 ■ "Provisions for Imposition upon Hungary at Time of Surrender Approved by JCS for Communication to EAC," February 1944. NARA, RG 218 JCS Geographical Files 42–45, Box 191.

9 ■ Memorandum for Brigadier General Hayes E. Kramer Chief, MIS, The Pentagon, September 14, 1943. NARA, General Records of the State Department, Central Files 1940–1944, European War, Box 2956.

10 ■ "Implementation Study for Overall Special Programs for Strategic Services in the Balkans as They Pertain to Hungary," OSS Planning Group, December 31, 1943. NARA, RG 226 OSS, Entry 144, Box 30.

11 ■ For further details see László Borhi, *Magyar–amerikai kapcsolatok 1945–1989* [Hungarian–American Relations, 1945–1989]. Budapest: Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2009, pp. 70–96.

12 ■ "The US and East–West Relations in Europe". Memorandum by the Department of State, August 3, 1963. NARA, RG 59 Records of the Department of State, Ernest K. Lindley Files 1961–1969, Lot File 71D273, Box 4.

13 ■ See János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, Hoover Institution Press, 1972, pp. 84–86; Tamás Magyarics, "Az Egyesült Államok és Magyarország, 1957–1967 [The United States and Hungary, 1957–1967]". *Századok,* vol. 130, no. 3. (1996), p. 583.

14 ■ Memorandum of Conversation, June 13, 1963. Participants: Chester Bowles, János Radványi, NARA, RG 59 Records of the Department of State, Hungary 1960–1963, Political Relations Between the US and Hungary 1960–1963, microfilm, roll 93.

15 ■ Telegram by Secretary of State Rusk, August 1962. Ibid.

16 ■ Tibor Zádor's report to János Péter about the invitation of American Foreign Service Officials, January 23, 1962. MOL, Küm, USA tük, XIX-J-1-j, 15, 5/e, 001234.

17 ■ Memorandum of Conversation, April 26, 1962. Participants: Radványi, McGhee, McKisson. NARA, RG 59 Records of the Department of State, Political Relations Between Hungary and the United States, microfilm, reel 93.

18 ■ Pál Rácz to János Radványi, Conversation with McGhee, May 24, 1962. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Box 15, 5/e, 005115.

19 ■ Dénes Polgár's note, May 21, 1962 and János Radványi's report, May 25, 1962. MOL, Küm, USA tük, XIX-J-1-j, Box 15, 5/e, 005413. The American Foreign Service used Dénes Polgár as an alternative channel of communication to the Hungarian leadership. In a submission related to normalization the Political Committee referred to a report by Polgár. It can therefore be presumed that they wished to use Polgár to circumvent the Foreign Ministry.

20 ■ The American Legation in Budapest to the Secretary of State, May 31, 1962. NARA, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Political Relations between Hungary and the United States, 611.64, 1960–63, microfilm, roll 93.

21 ■ János Radványi's précis for Foreign Minister János Péter, September 11, 1962. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, Box 6, 001224/6.

22 ■ Telegram from New York to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1962. NARA, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Internal Affairs of Hungary 1960–1963, microfilm, roll 2.

23 ■ Memorandum of Conversation, September 26, 1962. Participants: Kreisky, Rusk. NARA, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Internal Affairs of Hungary 1960–1963, microfilm, roll 2.

24 ■ Memorandum by the State Department related to the Hungarian question and the amnesty, October 20, 1962. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, 4/bd, Box 6. A report by Chargé d'Affaires János Radványi with reference to the State Department memorandum, November 7, 1962, loc. cit. 001224/8/1962.

25 ■ Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers,* op. cit., pp. 140–141.

26 ■ The American Legation in Hungary to the Secretary of State, November 24, 1962. NARA, RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Political Relations between Hungary and the United States, 611.64, 1960–63, microfilm, reel 93.

27 ■ Radványi's report to János Péter, December 21, 1962. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, Box 6, 00598.

28 ■ "Bridgebuilding in Eastern Europe", July 31, 1964, NARA RG 59 Records of the Department of State, Lindley Files, Lot File 71D273, Box 4.

29 ■ Note by the International Political Relations Division of the Foreign Ministry, April 29, 1976. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, Box 18, 1-002878/5-1976.

30 ■ Ibid.

31 ■ The Hungarian Holy Crown, memorandum drafted by A. C. Klay, n. d. (1977), MOL, XXXII-17, Box 3.

32 ■ Memorandum of Conversation, March 21, 1970. Participants: Béla Varga, Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, Emory C. Swank, Robert McKisson, John R. Vought. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

33 ■ Tibor Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja* [The American Adventure of the Holy Crown]. Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos University, 1997, p. 67.

34 ■ Memorandum by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance for the President on Strenghtening Relations with Hungary, n. d. (1977), MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

35 ■ Personal communication by Thomas Simons.

36 ■ The Secretary of State (Vance) to the American Embassy in Rome (Lodge), May 1977. Suggestions for Conversation with Casaroli. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

37 ■ Memorandum by George Vest to Cyrus Vance through Matthew Nimetz, July 20, 1977. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

38 ■ Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President on Strenghtening Relations with Hungary, n. d. (1977), MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

39 ■ Reports on negotiations with Manfred Schüler, head of the German Federal Chancellery, July 25, 1977. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, Box 19, 10-001100/8-1977.

40 ■ Memorandum by Vance to President Carter, July 27, 1977. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

41 ■ The State Department to the US Ambassador, n. d. (August 3, 1977), MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2; The U.S. Ambassador (Kaiser) to the Secretary of State (Vance), August 3, 1977, loc. cit.

42 ■ Telegram by Nimetz to the U.S. Ambassador, August 17, 1977. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2.

43 ■ Memorandum on Ambassador Kaiser's call on János Nagy. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük, Box 19, 10-001100/10-1977. See also Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja,* op. cit., p. 82.

44 ■ Memorandum by Vest to the Deputy Secretary of State through Nimetz, October 11, 1977. MOL, XXXII-17, Box 2; Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja,* op. cit., pp. 75–76.

45 ■ Note on the meeting between Foreign Minister Puja and State Secretary Vance, October 4, 1977. Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja,* op. cit., p. 83.

46 ■ Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja,* op. cit., p. 85.

47 ■ Minutes of the December 13, 1977 meeting of the Political Committee and the Foreign Minister's submission to the Political Committee, December 9, 1977. MOL, 288. f., 5. cs., 733. őe.

Csaba Zahorán

Foreign Policy Challenges

László Csaba, Géza Jeszenszky, János Martonyi and Lajos Péter Kovács ed., *Helyünk a világban. A magyar külpolitika útja a 21. században* (Our Place in the World. The Path of Hungarian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century). Manréza Papers 8. Budapest: Éghajlat, 2009, 216 pp.

Few would dispute that Hungary and the world have changed dramatically since state socialism dissolved. Regimes collapsed and new ones have taken their place. Whole social and economic systems—systems which had stood firm until the end of the 1980s—were reconfigured. With the hindsight of twenty years, it is clear that the end of the 1990s marked the irrevocable conclusion of an era. The future, it now appears, will be no less provoking.

Our Place in the World. The Path of Hungarian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century assesses the post-Communist upheaval and looks ahead. The book offers more than yet another academic study, and its tone is informal. Lajos Péter Kovács, its editor, talked to László Csaba, Professor of Economics at the Central European University and the Corvinus University in Budapest and at the University of Debrecen, the historian Géza Jeszenszky (foreign minister, 1990–94 and Washington ambassador, 1998–2002), and János Martonyi, who had a distinguished diplomatic career and, among other important posts, was foreign minister during that latter period. Martonyi is reprising his role in the new government of the Fidesz–Christian Democratic alliance. The conversations situate Hungary in the context of Europe and, more narrowly, in Central and Eastern Europe. They discuss the two decades since the democratic transition as well as new challenges and opportunities lying in wait in the new century.

The exchange of views is introduced by the family histories of the participants, detailing not only their personal background but also illuminating Hungary's recent and more distant past. Their own lives show how manifold the links are that tie Hungary to the region, and not only to territories inhabited by ethnic Hungarians. A shared element of the three family histories is a western and European orientation which backs a many centuries old traditional wish to be considered part of the West.

It is hardly surprising that a whole chapter is devoted to Trianon, a traumatic peripeteia for Hungarians. It continues to

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cast a long shadow ninety years after the peace treaty that forced Hungary to give up two thirds of its territory. Here, Géza Jeszenszky takes the lead. A historian and diplomat, Jeszenszky has confronted the costs of Trianon on many occasions. He brings into focus Hungary's negative image abroad at the start of the 20th century[1] and the role this picture played in the period leading up to Trianon. In itself, this provides a useful lesson for the present day. László Csaba approaches this sensitive question from a different angle, discussing the discrepancies between the often emotional reactions of people and the views of historians. In the subsequent chapter, "Desires and Dead Ends", Martonyi and Jeszenszky discuss the dangers posed by a misleading national identity and revisionist "national daydreaming". Csaba stesses that Hungarians are bad at facing up to the past and the scarcity of public debate is lamentable; a clear-eyed view would help Hungarians surmount the obstacles of such odd catchphrases as "the sinful nation."[2] Martonyi offers an outline of ideas about how Hungarian communities outside Hungary's borders can survive while leaving them the freedom to live life however they please.

The fate of Hungarian communities beyond the borders is a central subject which returns over several chapters. This fate is important not only to Hungarian national identity and public thinking. It also has an impact on Hungary's relationship with its neighbours, as well as being a seminal feature of cooperation in Central Europe. However, the situation of Hungarian minorities—despite all the achievements of Euro-Atlantic integration—is strongly dependent on the political setup in the mother country. Hungary is sometimes an initiator in this area (an example is the Act of 2001 on Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries). But usually it is the other way round, and Hungarian diplomacy is forced to react to measures taken by neighbours. As far as Hungarian–Slovak relations are concerned, Martonyi insists that "they have been shaped by Bratislava for the past 20 years."[3]

The issue of Hungarian minorities is also addressed in the chapter "Autonomy or Regionalism?" For the Hungarian intelligentsia, the inadequacy of concepts related to autonomy has underpinned disillusionment with the transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Hungary and the Hungarian elites abroad regard self-governance—which has worked well in several places in western Europe—as the best way to serve Hungarian minorities and the region's stability. The majority populations of neighbouring countries on their part see it as an infringement on sovereignty and an attack on their interests. Csaba sees little hope for autonomy; it would be more pragmatic to work towards economic integration while restoring transport and other types of cooperation between regions now divided by frontiers. Jeszenszky mentions that despite initial high hopes and aspirations at the start of the 1990s, support for strivings for autonomy on the part of the European

1 ■ Jeszenszky has written a book on the topic: *Az elveszett presztízs. Magyarország megítélésének változása 1894–1918* [Lost Prestige. Changes in the Image of Hungary 1894–1918]. Budapest: Magyar Szemle Alapítvány, 1994.
2 ■ p. 52.
3 ■ p. 163.

Union, too, has lost priority status. He confronts autonomy-based-on-separation with multiculturalism, citing several negative examples as to why the latter has proven illusory in resolving ethnic conflict. In his opinion, autonomy should be the way forward in our region, even if western European attitudes are often controversial, something that János Martonyi also emphasizes. Csaba, too, highlights the ambiguous results of multiculturalism, calling attention to the dangers in stalling real integration. In addition to foreign examples, Csaba also refers to the colossal task of integrating the Roma, a problem particularly acute in north and eastern Hungary, and generally in the countryside.

Under the heading "Hopes and Realities after the Regime Change", talk centres on the global political implications of the collapse of the Soviet bloc in Central and Eastern Europe. Jeszenszky and Martonyi give particularly interesting insights into the West's ambiguous reception of the transition to democracy. Mention is made of the global political role of the US, too, while Csaba focuses more on the conflicts and problems which emerged after the Cold War. Csaba holds that we must face up to the fact that many events and processes in the world are beyond our control, often even unpredictable. The emergence of this more unpredictable, multipolar world has triggered the appearance of new challenges, such as transnational crime and disease, terrorist networks and the danger of internet abuse. In the chapters "Changing Power Relations" and "A Dangerous World" he adds to the list demographic problems and value system crises.

Present-day Hungarian society is examined through the prism of its past tribulations, but instead of dwelling on loss, an examination of how possible future breakdowns can be averted follows. Csaba offers glaring facts and figures as the backdrop to past tragedies, but Hungarian society, he argues, should get over the emotional blow of such losses which cloud its mentality. He draws a startling comparison between post-civil-war Greece or Spain and Hungary after the change of regime.[4] After the transition Hungary did not experience armed conflict but, he insists, divisions here are greater than in those countries after their civil wars.

The last three chapters feature separate tête-à-têtes between the editor and contributors. First, János Martonyi expresses his view that during Hungary's Socialist-Liberal coalition in 2002–2010, a consensus on foreign policy built up over the preceding ten years disintegrated, and now a new national strategy is needed. The Gabčikovo dam and EU accession are mentioned as well. Csaba recalls the regime change from an economic point of view, focusing on the "double game" of the West and the International Monetary Fund targeting the thawing of the Hungarian regime in the 1980s[5]. Jeszenszky highlights the minority question, while touching on another intriguing problem—chances for a potential revision of borders after 1990. To show how unrealistic this is he brings forth objective arguments: Hungary's limited opportunities and the changed ethnic composition since Trianon, but he also points out a "total lack of inclination on Hungary's part to fight any kind of battle since 1990."[6] For all the above reasons the

4 ■ p. 77.
5 ■ p. 188.
6 ■ p. 207.

Hungarian government has not taken up the issue of border revision despite receiving plenty of criticism in this respect, both from Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries and within Hungary. Much attention is devoted to the personality and politics of József Antall, Hungary's late first prime minister, to whom the book is dedicated.

The book covers several further themes, as the conversation of participants—all of whom possess wide-ranging knowledge and rich professional and life experiences—wanders off in all directions. However, the discussion does not fall apart. The dangers of using an informal genre are alleviated partly thanks to the superb editing and partly to the clarity of argumentation demonstrated by the participants, as they illustrate their thoughts with clear examples and related experiences throughout. The message is thus easily absorbed and makes the text an enjoyable read. Another welcome factor not to be overlooked is that the guests, owing to their dissenting political and world views, often assess or criticize, but they do this in a reserved style and with a sense of proportion at all times.

Our Place in the World makes interesting reading. Its aim is not to dazzle the reader with new theories or revolutionary proposals, but to provoke thinking on the events of past and present, while illuminating interconnections and context. It does not strive to teach, but there is much here to learn from. ❧

Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszák

A More Nuanced Portrait

The Bicentennial of the Birth of Miklós Barabás (1810–1898)

In his autobiography, which was written towards the end of his life, Miklós Barabás commented on the significance of his endeavours of the 1860s: "It would hardly be worthwhile to dwell on the details of my everyday life, because I could say little other than that I was continuously painting; however, with regards to my deeds in public affairs, I consider some of them worthy of mention as not having been insignificant." Similarly, critical assessments of his importance have tended to lay greater emphasis on the contributions Barabás made to institutional advances in the area of culture, such as his role in the Art Society of Pest and the National Society of Hungarian Fine Arts, rather than on his achievements as a painter. A highly prolific painter who lived to a great age, Barabás, perhaps inevitably, suffered the disdain of his younger fellow artists. Yet, as is often the case with masters who at the height of their careers are respected by contemporaries but whose art is later dismissed as tedious and repetitious, later scholars have from time to time drawn attention to signs of innovation in his art not apparent at first glance. The 200th anniversary of his birth offers an occasion to probe the experimental aspects of his work, from his early panoramic sketch of Bucharest, made with the help of a camera obscura, to the photographic experiments of his later life.

Unlike that of many of his contemporaries, Barabás' life and work is widely documented. In addition to the autobiography mentioned above, a considerable quantity of his correspondence with friends and people who commissioned paintings has survived. Publications in journals throughout his career document the appraisal of his art by others and offer insights into his own attitudes, including his responses to his critics, which occasionally struck a defensive note. In addition, the list of works which he kept from 1830 until

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his death, provides an unprecedented record for historians of nineteenth-century Hungarian art.

Barabás' career as eventually one of the most prominent painters in Hungary began in 1836 when he came to Pest after touring Italy and presented his copy of Veronese's *The Abduction of Europa* in the National Casino, a place where noblemen and intellectuals gathered. At a time when Hungarian intellectuals were beginning to propose that Hungarian artists should be favoured over Austrian painters and the quantity of portrait commissions was dramatically on the rise, Barabás soon found himself very busy, so much so that he decided on making Pest his home. His peers, artists like Jakab Marastoni, Sándor Kozina and later Alajos Györgyi-Giergl and József Borsos, perhaps created equally emblematic portraits at the time, but Barabás was the first painter to be elected to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Furthermore, the majority of public portrait commissions fell to him, making him an exceptionally prolific artist of nineteenth-century Hungary.

Thanks to engravings and lithographs, Barabás' portrayals of the great figures of Hungarian culture and public life and his oils of Hungarian village life were already largely known in the nineteenth century. Although many of these works were exhibited at a jubilee exhibition in 1878, his watercolours, a diverse array of portraits, landscapes and genre scenes, many of which remained in his possession until the end of his life, were less known. A year after Barabás' death commentators marvelled at these works when several of his watercolours were put on sale as part of an exhibition to raise money for his mausoleum. One critic, Tamás Szana, noted that if it had not been for opportunities offered by the vanity of his contemporaries, Barabás would have devoted himself entirely to his true passion, landscape painting. But there is evidence suggesting that his works on paper were sought after even during his lifetime. He would carry with him a large album of watercolours from which prospective customers could choose or commission copies, a sales trick that he had learned from the Scotsman William Leighton Leitch, whom he befriended in 1834 during his travels in Italy. Barabás had the album with him when he journeyed to Gräfenberg Spa in 1839, where visitors requested copies of some of the paintings. A letter written to Barabás by the director of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, Ernő Kammerer, who had the reputation of being more conservative than his predecessor Károly Pulszky, testifies to the fact that even during his lifetime Barabás' watercolour landscapes received the attention of the most prominent museum in the country. Since then almost all his biographers, including Nóra Veszprémi, his most recent (her monograph was published by Corvina in 2009), have valued his watercolours as among his finest works of art.

Yet despite the undisputed significance of his watercolours, Barabás' role as a kind of documentarian responsible for the portrayals, by now canonical, of

artists and public figures of the time seems to override attitudes to the experimental nature of some of his work and the more intimate side of his art, such as the watercolour landscapes that he painted at every stage of his long career. One must keep in mind, of course, that these works did not become widely known even after having become part of museum collections for the simple reason that, given their fragility, they had to be kept in protective storage. Barabás used a swift watercolour technique, the essence of which was to begin with large blocks of colour on wet paper, to which further details were added, a technique also learned from Leitch that was typical of the English watercolour tradition, but scarcely employed in Central Europe at the time. These watercolours depict a divergent variety of landscapes, including Italian cities, the landmarks (both natural and man-made) of Transylvania, distinctive lowland scenes of the Great Hungarian Plain, life along the Danube in the burgeoning city of Pest, and the surroundings of his summer house in Buda. Late examples of his landscapes depict the mountainous regions of upper Hungary (today Slovakia), where Barabás drew sketches of the dramatic contours of the Tatra Mountains.

It may seem difficult to reconcile these two approaches to painting, oil portraiture and watercolour landscape. One seems to have been dictated by the demands of the market, as the practical-minded Barabás sought to provide for his Swiss wife and growing family, while the other reflects the painter's interest in methods and manners of depiction, an interest he pursued merely for his pleasure. Writing in his reminiscences on the preponderance of portraits in his oeuvre, Barabás himself complained that "here one has no prospect of earning a living painting anything else." Yet the line dividing the two approaches is not as distinct as it might appear at first sight. Can one simply classify the portrait as public, the watercolour as private? Should the portrait inexorably be interpreted as a mere response to the demands of the marketplace? What can one infer on the basis of technique? Should the watercolour, the product of bold, rapid brushstrokes, be seen as the spontaneous expression of fleeting visual experience and the oil portrait as the craft of deliberation and formulaic procedure? A closer look at the context of Barabás' oeuvre offers a more nuanced understanding of the two approaches and throws into question any simplistic confrontation of the two.

Many of Barabás' portraits are characteristically seen as representative portrayals of notable personages, yet his correspondence with the people who commissioned paintings reminds us that his friendships with his models were often profound and long-lasting. One should keep in mind that to Barabás, the poets Mihály Vörösmarty, Sándor Petőfi, János Arany and the novelist Zsigmond Kemény, living classics of their era, were not simply highly esteemed writers who sat for official portraits commissioned by various institutions, but

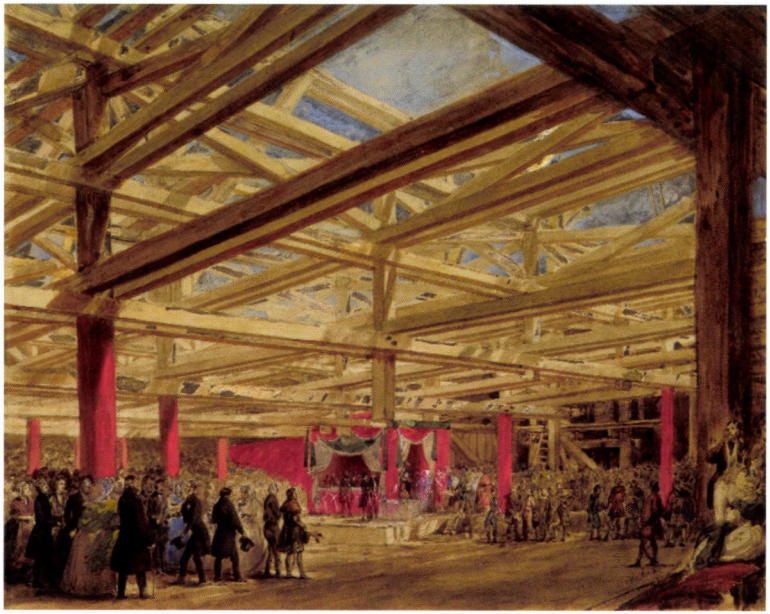
Miklós Barabás: *Self-Portrait,* 1862
oil on canvas, 122 × 92 cm
Private collection

Miklós Barabás: *Sunset on the Great Plain with Two Figures,* 1838
watercolour, paper, 25 × 32 cm
Private collection

Miklós Barabás: *The Blue Grotto in Capri,* 1835
watercolour, paper, 22 × 37 cm
Private collection

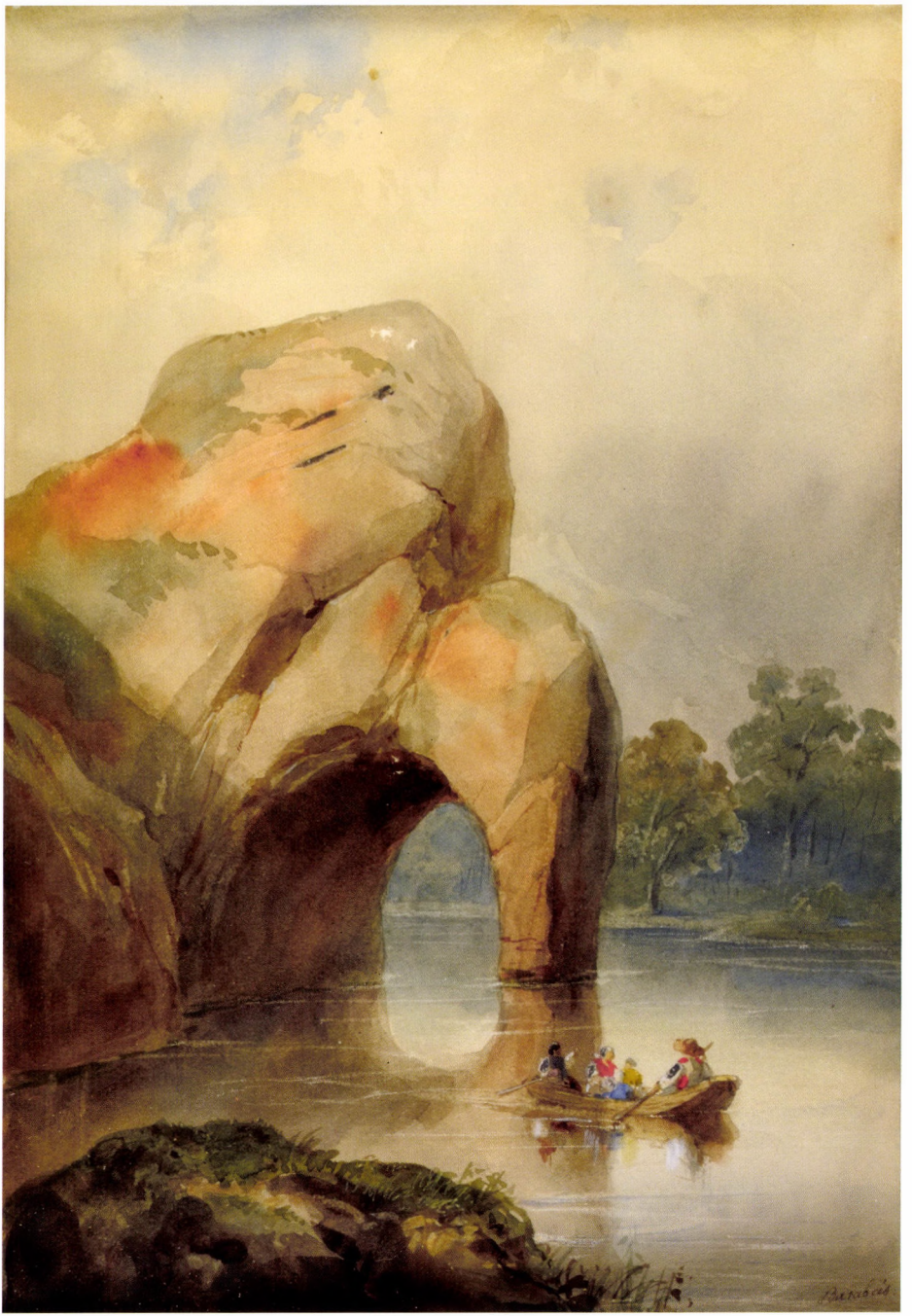
Miklós Barabás: *The Derra House Destroyed by the Flood,* 1838
watercolour, paper, 10.2 × 17.6 cm
Budapest History Museum

Miklós Barabás: *The Lake in the City Park,* 1842
watercolour, paper, 17.4 × 24.6 cm
Budapest History Museum



Miklós Barabás: *The Construction of the Chain Bridge,* 1841
watercolour, paper, 32.7 × 44.9 cm
Budapest History Museum

Miklós Barabás: *The Barabás Villa in the Városmajor,* 1853
watercolour, paper, 27 × 36.65 cm
Budapest History Museum



Miklós Barabás: *The Great Arch Crag,* 1835
watercolour, paper, 24.5 × 16.7 cm
Private collection

Miklós Barabás: *Kornélia Prielle, actress,* 1846
watercolour, paper, 30.7 × 26.5 cm
Budapest History Museum

Miklós Barabás: *János László Pyrker, Archbishop of Eger,* 1842
oil on canvas, 245 × 168 cm
Dobó István Museum, Eger

Miklós Barabás: *Susanne Bois de Chesne,* 1842
ivory miniature, 11.8 × 9.8 cm
Private collection

rather friends with whom he cherished close ties. Many of his portraits were made years after the death of the person depicted on the basis of earlier portraits and sometimes photographs on the one hand, and personal memories of departed friends on the other. Barabás was one of the first Hungarian painters to be fully accepted into the circle of intellectuals striving to mould a distinctly Hungarian national culture. Contemporaries saw in his work the possibility of fashioning genuine Hungarian visual art, an expectation which prompted him not only to paint portraits of the figures of the Hungarian pantheon, but to try his brush at more difficult compositions featuring numerous figures and touching on subjects associated with Hungarian identity.

Miklós Barabás: Mihály Vörösmarty, *1857*
pen and ink drawing, paper, 17 x 13.5 cm
Budapest History Museum

One should not forget that Barabás' oeuvre is unquestionably intertwined with the dramatic historical changes which took place at the time. It has often been said that he had little affinity for politics, yet Artúr Görgey (supreme commander during the 1848 Revolution) was the godfather of his fourth child, his only son. One of the most expressive and moving parts of his autobiography refers to the grief he suffered during the "sad October days" of 1849. As art historian Beatrix Basics has shown, the series of drawings depicting Sándor József Nagy, János Máriássy, Sándor and Károly Földváry, Artúr Görgey, János Damjanich, József Bem, György Klapka and Károly Leiningen form a kind of pantheon of the heroes of the 1848 Revolution. Other works offer glimpses of life in Hungary in the nineteenth century. We see pictures showing contemporaneous events, including episodes of the expansion of the city of Pest-Buda, scenes of everyday life in its streets, and the effects of the 1838 flood. Given that Barabás was a resident of the city who owned homes on both banks of the Danube, these paintings should not be seen as the records of a visiting traveller, as indeed becomes apparent when one compares them to the depictions of the city by the Viennese painters Jacob and Rudolf Alt.

Perhaps the most telling examples of how public and private roles fuse in Barabás' art are the numerous self-portraits and his autobiography, a kind of verbal analogy to the self-portraits. While several of the self-portraits were commissioned (such as the half-length portrait of 1877 for the National Society of Hungarian Fine Arts), those done solely for members of his family differ little from the former. In his self-portraits Barabás never wears a painter's smock or cap, but rather middle-class attire at all times. If the setting is shown it is always an interior of a middle-class home, never a studio with draperies or other props suggesting the workplace of a painter. The self-portrait of 1862 depicts him as a well-respected intellectual, hinting only at the tools of his art, but never at work. It is the companion to a portrait of his wife; both are three-quarter life-size images. Although the portraits are considerable in size, Barabás never listed them in his fairly inclusive catalogue of works, and to this day they remain in the possession of the artist's family. A late lithograph self-portrait made when Barabás was seventy-five shows him as a man of considerable status, adorned with the insignia of the Order of the Iron Crown and in ceremonial Hungarian attire. Barabás gave several signed copies of this lithograph to relatives. Numerous notebooks survive in which he jotted down poems, techniques and financial records, but he did not keep a journal, writing an extensive autobiography towards the end of his life instead. In it, Barabás strikes an intimate note, giving great emphasis to his childhood and interspersing the narrative with countless personal anecdotes. Nevertheless he remained keenly aware of his audience, closely controlling the image he wanted to present to the public and determining his place in society and in art history. It is not an ars poetica, but rather an account structured around the milestones of his career as a painter.

Barabás' lack of formal training may have contributed to his interest in experimenting with certain techniques and mediums. What seems to have offset this propensity was the sheer fact that by the age of thirty he was the most sought-after portraitist in Pest-Buda, and as such, his career was largely determined by the market and his commissions. Two of the surviving notebooks testify that long after having established his career he remained curious about new techniques and materials, as well as theories concerning the fine arts, into which he delved as part of the research he did for a lecture on perspective delivered at the age of forty-nine at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. These notebooks shed light on how he acquired this knowledge. He would take notes gleaned from instruction manuals in various languages, write down the methods he himself had tried and tested, and record observations made on the basis of works by other painters. The table of contents at the back indicates that he made frequent use of these notebooks, looking up and reminding himself how certain results were achieved. The order of the instructions suggests that they were haphazardly jotted down, skipping

between various techniques and genres and other tasks, such as making paint or priming a canvas. It is very different from the well-structured education a painter who received formal training would have had. These directions are interspersed with titles of art historical publications, showing that parallel to perfecting his painting techniques he was also educating himself to be a master enlightened on questions of contemporary theory.

Bypassing academic training (if perhaps not deliberately), Barabás was able to try his hand at less conventional genres, such as the series of preliminary drawings for an 1832 panorama showing a 360-degree view of the city of Bucharest. His attempt at a panorama predated by several decades experiments with this genre by any other Hungarian painter. In the foreground of the sheet numbered 1, which came closer to completion than the others in that it was painted in watercolours, one sees a scene with a Romanian Boyar and a high-ranking soldier, which is most likely a reference to a peace treaty. All the other sheets show numerous signs of the use of a camera obscura. Fainter lines, curved presumably as a result of the surface of the lens, have later been 'straightened' with a darker line. Furthermore each sheet of paper has border frames that were drawn later and that therefore cut off some of the details, details that were sketched again on the adjacent sheets. The succession of wide-angled documentary-like 'shots,' the equal shade and width of all the lines and the lack of any compositional work all attest to the use of an optical aid.

Barabás' lack of formal training may have also allowed him to incorporate into his art methods and manners he had spotted in works by great masters of certain genres, such as the compositions and the manner of execution prevalent in the miniature portraits of Moritz Michael Daffinger. He had jotted down Daffinger's name during his stay in Vienna, and his own miniature portraits painted a decade later bear a striking affinity to works by the Austrian miniaturist. Portrait miniatures occupy a place of particular significance in Barabás' oeuvre. As a youth in his late teens, well before he had begun to acquaint himself with the techniques of oil painting, Barabás painted miniatures using slight, delicate brushstrokes. Indeed his first commissions were for portrait miniatures in the Transylvanian towns of Nagyenyed (Aiud, Romania) and Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Romania). However, the 1842 portrait of his wife from 1842, painted some fifteen years later, shows an entirely different approach to miniature portrait painting. Depicting her seated on a balcony with the sky and tree foliage in the background, the portrayal's composition reminds of portraits much larger in scale. In addition to the change in composition (swapping the neutral background for an actual environment), the 1842 piece also demonstrates a change in technique. Exploiting the reflective property of the ivory, Barabás scratches the painted surface and even leaves the base of his portrayal unpainted in certain areas, taking advantage of the light, diaphanous

Miklós Barabás: The Barabás Girls on the Steps of the Villa in Városmajor, *1864, albumin, 11 x 14 cm*
Private collection

glow to render the depiction more vivid.

Even his foray into the genre of photography was more than a mere short-lived venture motivated by commercial interests. The latter of the two surviving notebooks contains the details concerning the chemical admixtures he concocted for use in the process of development. In collaboration with János Fajth, he had opened his short-lived photography studio in 1862, but he had experimented with daguerreotypes two decades earlier. The most common of his products were the *cartes-de-visite,* in which the models are seated or standing in an interior, or sometimes with an architectural element and a background of a painted canvas suggesting an outdoor setting. Girls hold dolls, young men appear next to desks implying learning; and women are occasionally depicted as if they were in the middle of sewing. His studio had numerous photographic devices, including ones capable of taking larger photographs. One curious assembly contains photographs much larger in size showing members of his family or close friends, such as the painter Mihály Kovács. The setting recalls the garden of their Buda villa, and on occasion Barabás even took pictures in the open air, as a group photo of his family and servants on the steps of their villa attests. Sometimes he coloured his photographs or made prints of his own paintings, blocking out or masking parts of the negative and thereby creating new compositions. The debate between Barabás and Bertalan Székely on photography as a creative art indisputably questions the validity of simply labelling the older Barabás as the more conservative artist. Even after Barabás closed his studio, photographs continued to play an important part in his work, serving often as the basis for his oil portraits. Numerous letters survive thanking him for a portrait and noting that both the commissioned oil painting and the *carte-de-visite,* which had been sent to him and on which he had based

the depiction, had arrived back to the owner safe and sound. A letter from the English Conservative politician John Cunliffe Pickersgill dated 23 October, 1867 states in reference to a portrait of Pickersgill's wife that as soon as she had a new calling card he will send it, as if Barabás undertook portrait commissions of people he had never met, basing his work rather solely on a small print.

A curious opposition emerges in the literature on Barabás' portraits between the accuracy of his depictions and the idealization of his sitters. He himself uses the phrase "idealized portrait," and also claims that the reason he gave up preparing preliminary sketches for portraits was that it was an intermediary step in which some of the resemblance was lost. Nevertheless we know of preliminary drawings and watercolour sketches that were made not solely for the purpose of visualizing the whole composition, but rather in order to allow the artist to focus on the face of the person portrayed. Not surprisingly, beautification of the sitter in the portrait business was the norm at the time, and in the case of Barabás it has been noted that his portraits of women are more idealized than his portraits of men. According to Miklós Szmrecsányi, in a commemorative speech on the 100th anniversary of his birth, Barabás claimed that he objected to small physical imperfections being rendered with too much realism. An 1827–1828 sketchbook which only recently came to light contains numerous portrait drawings depicting people as varied as his own kind in Nagyenyed and illustrious members of Nagyszeben society. As none of the final products (portrait miniatures) which these were presumably supposed to serve are known, the question remains whether these portrayals are devoid of idealization because they were drawn by an eighteen-year-old artist in the earliest phases of his career or because they were the first sketches of a later portrait. One finds examples of less idealized oil paintings in Barabás' later oeuvre as well, such as the 1837 double portrait of the Konkoly couple.

These and similar questions form the subject of various conferences, exhibitions and publications scheduled to take place in this bicentennial year. The exhibition and at the Budapest History Museum should be mentioned where a modest display consisting primarily of watercolours from the museum's collection and works in the possession of the artist's family presented a lesser known side of his work. In May 2010 a conference was hosted by the 12th district gallery which in 2004 organized a similar conference on Barabás, but this time the setting will be the Barabás Villa, built to his own design by Barabás for his family. The conference will include historians and art historians. Mihály Jánó, who previously edited a volume of papers given at a conference in Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sf. Gheorghe) in 1998, is now editing a similar volume which will focus on aspects of the artist's oeuvre relevant to Transylvanian and Romanian cultural history. Early this year Éva Bicskei and Terézia Kerny began organizing a conference which is to take place in November at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. ❧

James Hamilton

A Hungarian Painter in Yorkshire

György Gordon (1924–2005)

György Gordon was, through and through, a Hungarian painter. This is despite the fact that he spent the greater part of his working life in the small English city of Wakefield, in the industrial heartland of West Yorkshire, 260 km from London. There, from the early 1960s until his death, Gordon became a greatly loved teacher of painting to generations of Foundation students at Wakefield College of Art, and grew to become a landscape, figure and portrait painter of considerable importance in Britain. A retrospective exhibition of his portraits was held at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1995.

Intermixed with a streak of steely determination to pursue his own path as an artist, it was gentleness and courtesy that György chose, largely, to show to the world. These two qualities led me to him when, in 1974, in the then Wakefield Art Gallery, he and I worked together on the hanging of his retrospective exhibition. I had taken up my post as Keeper of Art at the gallery four weeks earlier, and György was well aware that, recent arrival as I was, I might be less than happy about arrangements already made. But with care and tact he introduced his work to me, and he, his wife Marianne and I became firm friends.

György Gordon's paintings throw light onto his personality, anxieties and passions, his determination and courage. Gordon was born in Budapest in 1924, the only child of a solicitor. Despite this connection with law, he took no part in the subject as a career choice. Indeed he soon discovered the streak of rebellious pent-up emotion that might have suggested he would not make such a good

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is a writer and curator, whose books and exhibitions explore aspects of art and science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His biographies of J. M. W. Turner (1997) and Michael Faraday (2002) led to his more recent book London Lights—The Minds that Moved the City that Shook the World 1805–1851 *(2007).*
His exhibition Turner and Italy, *shown in Ferrara and Edinburgh, was also mounted by the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, in 2009.*

lawyer. He told how as a boy he kicked in a school cellar window, for no apparent reason but bloody-mindedness.[1] Through the course of his life this characteristic evolved gradually into a dogged determination to challenge repressive authority, and gave him the courage to develop his own way as a painter, unhampered by the pressures of fashion, and underpinned by a growing self-knowledge and calm.

Gordon received his first informal art training in private art academies in Budapest, first under Tibor Gallé (1896–1944), and subsequently with Aurél Bernáth (1895–1982). When Hungary entered the Second World War in 1941, the destruction and hardship sent a splinter through Gordon's youthful understanding of the world, just as surely as it splintered his native country. In the early 1940s, while still a teenager, Gordon became a part-time ancillary ambulance man, witnessing events that branded themselves into his memory. His biographer György Noszlopy recounts how Gordon's most persistent and terrifying image was of a German army truck driver who had been crushed by his own vehicle, but was still alive when carried to the ambulance.[2] The memory of the man's flattened ribs and exposed shoulder-blades re-emerged to form the core of a series of visceral torso paintings in the 1960s.

After the liberation of Budapest by the Russian army, Gordon married the caricaturist Márta Ediger, who published under the name 'Edma'. Tinned tomato soup made the couple's wedding feast. Together, both being by now members of the Communist Party, György and Márta worked as graphic artists for the Party's Agitprop department, painting slogans in praise of the Red Army. To escape starvation they moved to Romania in 1945, where Gordon spent six months in the artists' colony at Nagybánya (Baia Mare, Romania), with the Hungarian painter Rudolf Diener-Dénes (1889–1956) and the Transylvanian sculptor Géza Vida (1913–1980). Here, Gordon built up a body of landscape and still life paintings that formed his first one-man exhibition, held in Bucharest in June 1947. These works are still to be traced.

By now, Gordon's life had been characterized by a fragmented programme of *ad hoc* education and expression as an artist, and by the shattered youth that was his generation's lot. Taking himself in hand he realized he needed formal art training, and returned in 1948 with Márta to Budapest to sit the two-week long entrance examination for the National Academy of Fine Arts. Two years of drawing from plaster casts and from models followed, and then three further years of project-based training in painting.

Nevertheless, taught as it was by one-time avant-garde artists János Kmetty (1889–1975), Jenő Barcsay (1900-1988) and Róbert Berény (1887–1953), the rigours of the training were underpinned by the assertion that school work was a means to an end. "One has to do it!" Kmetty muttered every time he entered a

1 ■ George T. Noszlopy, *György Gordon*. Yorkshire Artists series, no. 2, Otley: Smith Settle, 1989, p. 10.
2 ■ Op. cit., p. 16.

pupil's studio. Gordon's reflective response many years later was that "While we acquired the tricks of the trade, the prevailing academic mentality got into our nervous systems, and in my case, this delayed the process of my self-realization."[3]

To help support himself during his studentship, Gordon worked as a newspaper illustrator, typographer and graphic designer. He and Márta had a daughter, Anna, in 1950, and Gordon joined a co-operative run by the state-owned Fine Art Foundation, which paid a monthly salary for a continuous supply of banal oil paintings to sell in the Foundation's shops. Gordon's commitment to communism wavered critically in the period of its consolidation in Hungary after the death of Stalin in 1953. He felt betrayed by the shattering of the social and political ideals that he had perhaps naively sought to address and interpret through his work. Events leading up to the Hungarian uprising of October 1956 coincided with the sudden death of his mother, whose portrait, lying on the mortuary slab, he painted in the depths of emotion, anxiety and grief. This work, a savage expression of disorientation and loss, is one of the few paintings of Gordon's young manhood that is known to have survived.

Gordon felt that there was nothing left for him in Hungary after the death of his mother and the crushing of the uprising. Márta was in Australia, covering the Melbourne Olympics as a caricaturist, and although their marriage had been challenging, both wanted it to continue. They agreed to travel separately to America, and reunite there. With thousands of others, Gordon and Anna left Hungary for Austria, and at Salzburg joined a plane-load of Hungarian refugees seeking admission to the USA.

Here began a Cold War farce of epic proportions, the kind of story that might sit well in a John le Carré or Len Deighton novel. When interviewed by US immigration, Gordon admitted that he had been a member of the Communist Party, believing that the authorities would appreciate his frankness. They did. They sent him to an internment camp, interrogated him, kept him in custody, and then put him and Anna on a ship back to Europe. There Gordon was imprisoned for thirty days in Salzburg, while Anna was sent to an orphanage.

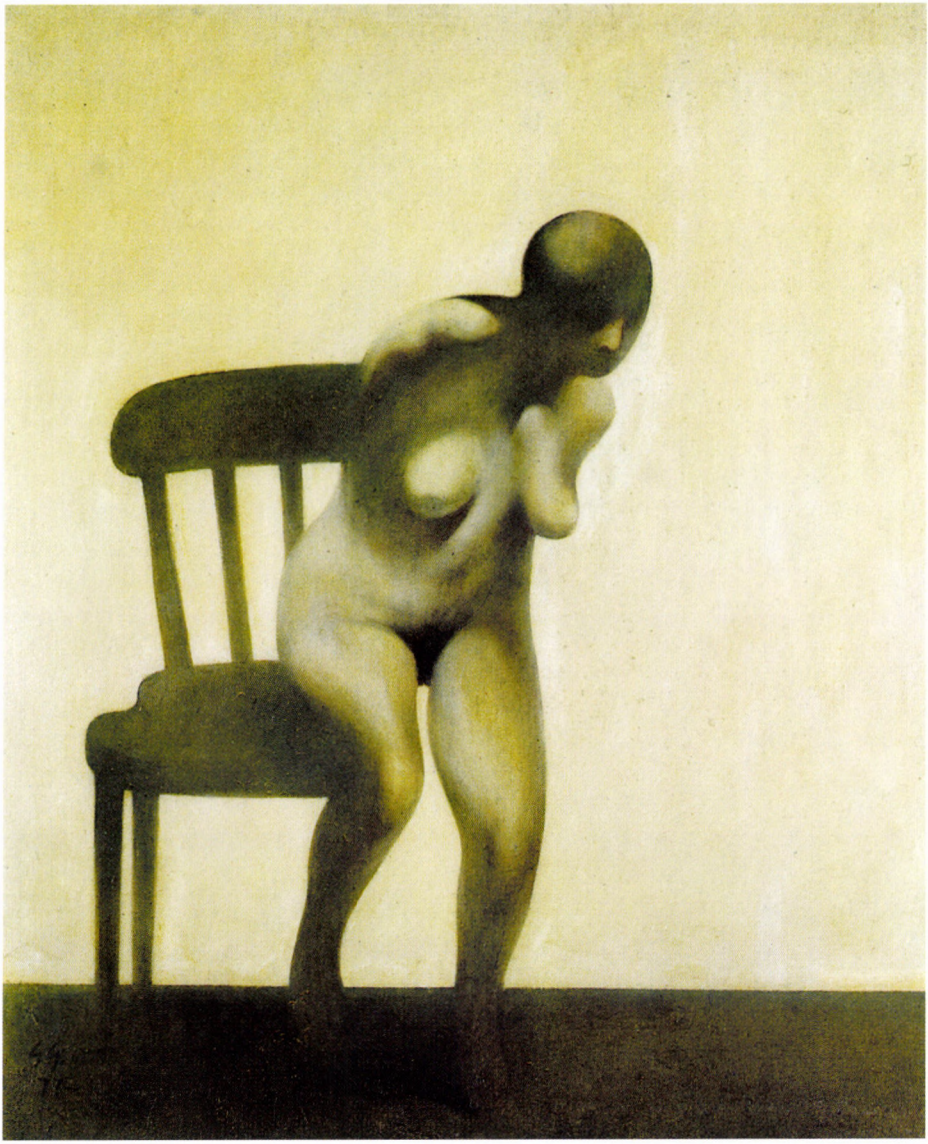
In this uncertain and frightening situation, and having failed to find his wife in the US, Gordon was duped by an honest-looking couple who offered to look after Anna, and took her off with them. They were child-snatchers, who vanished with Anna towards Germany. Seeking Márta, and frantic at Anna's disappearance, Gordon travelled on his release from the Salzburg prison to London. There eventually he and Márta were reunited, but the marriage was over. Meanwhile, with the help of the police and the Red Cross, Gordon found Anna at the German border, where her abductors had been arrested when trying to smuggle her across.

Such a painful and dramatic crossing from the communist to the free world forged in György Gordon not fury, but an attitude of calm, philosophical

3 ■ Op. cit., pp. 22–23.

György Gordon: *"First I Was Given a Violin"* from the series of illustrations to *The Circus* by Ferenc Karinthy, 1987–1988
lino print, 54.6 x 47 cm

György Gordon: *Woman with Chair*, Study II, 1976
pencil on tracing paper, 63 x 41.5 cm



György Gordon: *Woman with Chair*, 1980–81
oil on canvas, 76 x 64.5 cm

György Gordon: *Standing Self-Portrait*, 1984
oil on canvas, 106 x 106 cm

György Gordon: *Flattened Self-Portrait*, 1979
oil on canvas, 72 x 62 cm

György Gordon: *Self-Portrait with Blue Ground*, 1974
oil on canvas, 82 x 74 cm

György Gordon: *Crawling Wounded Torso*, 1969
oil on board, 55.5 x 101.7 cm

György Gordon: *Organism* I, 1971
oil on board, 50.7 x 57.9 cm

György Gordon: *Foreshortened Self-Portrait, Naked*, 1981–82
oil on canvas, 75 x 50 cm

György Gordon: *Hommage* à *Soutine, an Imaginary Portrait*, 1988
oil on canvas, 49 x 36 cm

György Gordon: *Hommage* à *Kafka, The Trial*, 1982–84
oil on canvas, 75 x 120 cm

György Gordon: *Lindsay Quartet* (Peter Cropper, Ronald Birks, Robin Ireland, Bernard Gregor-Smith), 2002–2003, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm
© National Portrait Gallery, London

reflection, and watchful friendship that belied the sombre mood of his art. The anger he needed to express found its way, entirely perhaps, into his painting and drawing. Gordon settled in a bedsit off the Finchley Road, north London, with Anna, who was by now seven years old. Although he still spoke little English, he found work as a graphic artist and typographer, and gradually discovered other émigré Hungarian artists and intellectuals who were repositioning their lives in Britain. These included the pianist Peter Frankl, the psychologist Vera Förster and the actress and art historian Erna Weiss. Among them also was the young musician Marianne Mózes, a small, lithe, fine-boned woman with brown eyes, liquid hands and a large voice. Marianne, who was training as a concert pianist at the Royal Academy of Music, was the daughter of two distinguished Budapest doctors, and had come out of Hungary another way. Marianne had a passion for art, literature and music, and with her effervescent and informed conversation and company she too became part of the evolving London Hungarian community. She and György were married in 1961; their son Adam was born in 1963.

György and Marianne Gordon became naturalized British subjects in 1964, the year György was appointed to the post of lecturer in Graphic Design at Wakefield Art College, while Marianne taught piano. The move from London to the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire was the active intervention that transformed Gordon's career. It soon became clear that he was a natural teacher, being modest enough to discover that teaching was a two-way process, and that he could learn from his pupils. As a consequence of his immersion in teaching, Gordon had to restrict his own painting to vacations, while drawing at weekends. This concentration of his energies generated periods of intense productivity, and launched a new and often violent expression of emotion and anger in paintings which reflected early and more recent experiences such as *Refugees* (1964–5) and *Crawling Wounded Torso* (1969). Such drawings as *Screaming Male Torso* (1970) and *Study for Homo Sapiens* (1971) have clear responses to Gordon's wartime experiences, which, even after nearly thirty years, were still being released. It was these works, and others like them, that filled Wakefield Art Gallery in 1974. Local critics compared him to Francis Bacon, an observation that was inevitable, but thoughtless, boring and wrong. Goya or Géricault would have been nearer the mark, if ambitious. Another series of the early 1970s was *Organisms*, dark and troubling organic forms with thick impasto that puckers like a rash out of smooth flowing paint.

During the 1970s, figures with faceless forms, and rounded, doll-like bodies, emerge from Gordon's pencil. They reveal perhaps the gentle side of the artist's nature, but also reveal something that had been becoming more and more apparent, his reluctance to allow eye contact with his subjects. Very few of Gordon's portraits or figure groups permit eye contact, which may have some kind of connection with his experience as a prisoner under interrogation.

Be that as it may, Gordon's pacific manner with the pencil or conté crayon coaxes the form into existence with affirmative cross-hatching which gives a velvety and rounded texture to the figure. This clearly recalls the work of his early teachers, in particular Barcsay. Though created through what amounts to a gentle massage, Gordon's intention in the late 1970s was to reduce form to a minimum, and rid himself of anything that seemed to be unnecessary. He recalled that he was at the time trying to "rewrite the figure", and do the maximum with the minimum means.

Gordon took close account of twentieth-century art history, the work of artist predecessors and his contemporaries. Seminal influences were the work of Honoré Daumier which he saw at the 1961 Tate exhibition, and Chaim Soutine, who had been a constant inspiration since he had seen Soutine's paintings in reproduction in Hungary. The examples of both of these artists allowed Gordon's mastery of creamy paint to suggest emotion and mood in a group of imaginary portraits that typify his method of work. In *Flattened Self-Portrait* (1971) Gordon experiments with black, a non-colour surface, with a low-toned pinkish grey dropped into it at the lips. The artist presents himself as dead, perhaps even enclosed in a coffin. "Here I was associating immigration with death", he told me. "Changing your home life, as I did, is a sort of death."

Gordon puts forward a more quizzical, resigned self-view in *Self-Portrait with a Blue Ground* (1974). Hope and optimism, never much in evidence in Gordon's work of the 1960s, may perhaps have crept unbidden into this grizzled head at its low-slung jaunty angle, and laid the beginnings for the future. It is characteristic of Gordon that his *homages* do not necessarily express themselves in the use of subject matter identifiable with his heroes, but instead in portraits of artists and writers whose work has affected the development of his own. *Imaginary Portraits,* of Kafka (1981) and of Soutine (1988) are typical examples, but nonetheless all his portraits, Gordon claimed, even the self-portraits, are imaginary:

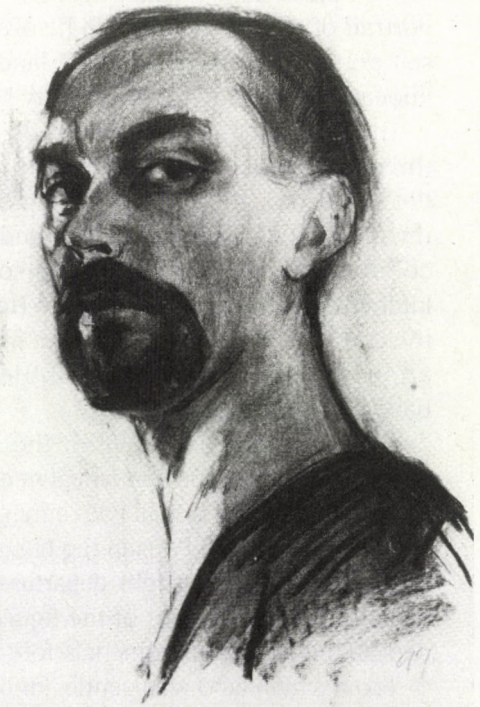
> I can't paint from looking at the actual object or person. I never paint my portraits by asking the person to sit for me. I start with several quick random sketches from the model and then shut the door behind me. That is when I am at my happiest. A sitter can't ever sit the way your vision develops for that painting.[4]

As one of Gordon's portrait subjects I sat for relatively short periods of half an hour here, an hour there, and I have to say that the evidence does not fully bear out the artist's claim that he made "several quick, random sketches". Random they are not, though quick they sometimes are, with their gentle pencil work and detailed colour notes. The off-set composition *Portrait of James Hamilton* (1986–87) is interesting and characteristic, while the blurred

4 ■ György Gordon in conversation with James Hamilton, 1994. Unless otherwise stated, all statements by Gordon are transcribed from conversations with Hamilton.

pink of the tie (green in the pastel) is shorthand for a very stylish multi-striped cotton tie from Copenhagen that I then wore. The dating of the portrait—'86–87'—reflects Gordon's practice of lingering over his works, taking his time, putting them up onto his easel and looking at them long and hard, touching here and there, or for hours maybe not touching at all.

Gordon was, however, his own most reliable and long-suffering model. He gave himself no quarter. He is naked in the small hours, with perhaps a single light bulb blazing within an empty room. He is, of course, alone. In one pair of paintings he reveals himself foreshortened from the waist down, all he sees he shows, green, grey, a reluctant pink and a turgid red, between the navel and the feet.



György Gordon: Self-Portrait, *Drawing, 1960*
charcoal on paper, 45 x 32 cm

The Gordons lived in a terraced house near Wakefield town centre before they moved in the late 1970s to the fresher air and clearer perspectives of Heath. Their house at Heath was a roofless ruin when they bought it, but gradually György and Marianne restored and converted it together. So, for the last thirty years of his life, this Budapest-born solicitor's son, transported to West Yorkshire, worked in his studio under the roof of a converted seventeenth-century barn on the edge of Heath Common near Wakefield. The barn has in its time been a smithy and a joiner's shop, serving the community and the five large formal eighteenth-century manor houses that edge the expansive common. Four of these houses survive. Were this Sussex, Wiltshire or Oxfordshire, three important English tourist centres, the manor houses would by now be cleaned of their smoky grime, and Heath Common would have a coach park, a gift shop, and a tourist information centre. But this is post-industrial West Yorkshire, just off the road between Wakefield and Barnsley, with a pub and some roaming gypsy horses.

To 'The Joiner's Shop' György and Marianne welcomed friends and acquaintances by the score. Conversation was free-flowing and serpentine;

supper generally came late. György in his blue denim boiler-suit made coffee as carefully as he would mix a particular tint of rose pink on his palette, and poured it slowly and with profound concentration, his head on one side, his eyes narrowed against his own tobacco smoke. At Heath, he became gradually more circumspect: "I had worked out of my system my old memories. I had finished with them." So away went the disabled puppets and dismembered corpses, and in their place came a series of small-scale assured portraits such as a sensitive portrait of Marianne, in which he overcomes his avoidance of eye contact, and self-portraits, interiors, still lifes, landscapes, figure groups and a moving set of linocuts interpreting the short story "The Circus" by Frigyes Karinthy.

In this period Gordon returned to painting landscapes, picking up the threads from his long distant past in Transylvania. There are landscapes of Provence, though there is nothing of the hot south here, but bleak and shot through with knife-like shapes and sharp local colour. There is naught for comfort here. Gordon reflects also on his own home landscape, from his kitchen window, looking out onto Heath Common. This is the unkempt side of the common, with grey-green wet misty grass and sky, and a gypsy horse. His art, now, has become wedded to Heath. Budapest, its memories and terrors, have left the foreground.

Gordon's later work, from the 1980s to around 2000, embraces both melancholy landscape and lyrical interiors of surprising composition: the studio beam with objects; a wall with sunlight falling on it and a view through a door beyond; a decorated Persian rug hung on a wall like an altarpiece. The paintings now are about filtering light, departure and farewell, the brevity of life and old age. As the colour seeps out of the figures to leave flesh green and grey, Gordon depicts that captured moment before time has to stop, before the final farewell.

From a man who was gentle, kind, understanding, hilarious, and a fine and perceptive teacher of art, these deeply melancholic works may come as a surprise. But they were the price of his gentleness and humour—fear, anxiety and distress expressed in the small hours between Gordon and his canvases. The horrors of Budapest in the 1940s and 1950s probably never left Gordon completely, despite what he said about being "finished with them" as subject matter. They may have haunted him even to his lonely night-studio in a Yorkshire country village, but if art can heal, Gordon's painting may have helped him to heal his scars, or at least to staunch their bleeding.

Although he doggedly retained a Hungarian accent, Gordon's English was by now fluent, and he allowed his name to be gently anglicized by his friends to 'George'. Nevertheless, his home town remained 'Vakefielt' to him to the end. Gradually 'Vakefielt' and 'Vest Yorkshire' took Gordon to its heart, and marked his ten years there by the retrospective exhibition of 1974, and exhibitions in Leeds, Harrogate and Huddersfield, as well as the National Portrait Gallery, in the 1980s and 1990s.

György Gordon was light-hearted and loquacious in talk, relishing verbal imagery and playing with English like a new and ever-unfamiliar toy. For some reason, which I will never know, he was fascinated by the sound of the name of the Derbyshire town 'Glossop': he would talk with a laugh about going 'Glossoping', and shall we go together? I listened warmly to György and Marianne talking affectionately to one another when they were at home or with friends. They referred to each other invariably as 'kutya', a word that I fondly imagined translated into English as 'darling' or 'sweetheart'. As every Hungarian knows, it does in fact mean 'dog'.

In his self-portraits Gordon shows us his raw side: he confronts the states of isolation and aloneness with a clear, unsentimental eye. He would listen to music as he worked; more often than not the Lindsay Quartet, four of Gordon's friends, of whom the National Portrait Gallery commissioned a group portrait in 2002. But it is through the self-portraits that Gordon achieved his most resonant expression. In some he presented himself as asleep, or dead; out-of-body paintings in which he achieves the ultimate detachment from the subject. Nevertheless, Gordon does not repine; instead, his apartness, his quizzical, investigative nature, and his acceptance of the long inevitable wait, has bred a body of work in which psychological insight is run through with lyricism, and personal likeness with the tough surface presence of paint.

Useful and beautiful things, full of charm and integrity, have been made in the Gordons' house since it was built, and György's relatively brief occupancy of it as a painter has continued that tradition exactly. In the studio, nothing has changed, nothing, since György died on 5 March 2005. The paintings are still stacked in bubblewrap, as if they have just come back from exhibition. The tubes and dabs of paint are there on his easel table, the dabs fresh and bright as the day he squeezed them—but touch them now, and they're hard as rock. The brushes are there still, standing neat, clean and soft in their pots, dry and fluffy. A painting of an old woman in a dressing gown, walking unsteadily on her Zimmer frame, is on the easel, stapled to a board. The mirror is there for use in painting self-portraits; the Giorgione double portrait postcard is there for inspiration; the well-worn wooden armchair, with its sleeveless jacket and shoulder bag, is still there for comfort and support. On György's desk, with its 2003 calendar, there are papers, his watch, and a small pile of his last drawings—the crucifixion. On the oak cross-beams, pots, masks, dolls, glass, decorative paraphernalia of exotic and mainly eastern European origin, stand together in line. As I walked through the studio again in January 2010, there was a touch in the air around my face, light and sweet—it was a cobweb. The fragments from György's past float along behind him like a cobweb, curling and eddying and singing as it goes. ❧

I Felt I Was Schoenberg's Pupil

Judit Rácz Talks with Zoltán Kocsis

Zoltán Kocsis has been chief conductor of the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra since 1997. Alongside his stellar career as a pianist Kocsis has been devoting more and more of his time to the orchestra, mounting Hungarian premieres of rarely played and new works, including his own transcriptions for orchestra of pieces by Bartók, Debussy and Ravel. His commitment to contemporary music has been recognized by, among others, György Kurtág, who dedicated several of his compositions to him. Kocsis's recording of Bartók's Out of Doors *was hailed by London-based* Gramophone *magazine as one of the greatest piano recordings of the twentieth century, and Philips included him in its series of the fifty greatest pianists.*

Kocsis's latest feat, attracting critical and public acclaim, was his completion of Schoenberg's Moses and Aaron, *left in two acts by the composer. The semi-staged premiere took place in the Palace of Arts on 16 January 2010 with the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir under the baton of Kocsis, with Wolfgang Schöne and Daniel Brenna in the principal roles.*

*

Judit Rácz: *The completion of Schoenberg's* Moses and Aaron *is a sensation not only from a musicological point of view. It seems to me that you did it for us listeners. I was convinced: I found it beautiful, authentic, coherent. It was Schoenberg and Kocsis at the same time. It has been discussed whether Schoenberg actually wanted to finish Act III, or whether he intentionally left the opera unfinished (and if so, why). There seem to be no conclusive arguments either way.*

Judit Rácz
is a journalist who has translated several books on music.

Zoltán Kocsis: Not long after Schoenberg died his widow said the opera should be left alone. I doubt he would have agreed. After all, he had written the words for Act III; it would be absurd to perform them without music. Even with the music it is rather like an epilogue.

An epilogue is a valid genre in its own right.

One reviewer thought I was disrespectful to compose longer musical interludes. Yet had I only set the extant words—less than ten minutes—to music then none of it would have made any sense. Let's not forget that Schoenberg himself composed several orchestral interludes for the first two acts. It is very important for music to 'deepen' the message, as Wagner put it. I tried to follow the directions included in Schoenberg's sketches as faithfully as possible.

When did he write those directions?

He wrote the opera in two spurts, which are dated in the manuscript. At one point he made a mistake in his twelve-note row, repeating the notes C – B instead of F# – E. We corrected that. I sent the errata list to the publisher Schott as well as to Schoenberg's descendants.

Can those errors be found in every edition?

They are both in the first edition and in Schott's complete edition. Some errors are due to inattentive copying. Unfortunately, all recordings—Boulez, Solti, Klutting, Gatti, Gielen—contain the mistakes.

How come no one noticed them during performances and recording sessions? Or did they not dare question the text out of excessive reverence?

It is a daunting task to check the whole score note for note. Besides, very few people have the kind of ear that is beyond perfect pitch, enabling them to analyze a twelve-tone row, immediately supplying the second set of six tones after the first set, or the third set of four tones after the first two sets. Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* is a case in point. It is not a strictly twelve-note piece, but it works with all twelve pitches in a singularly Bartókian way. In this work, the initial notes G – E – B-flat – E-flat function as a kind of dominant to the closing F – D – A-flat – C. Thus the remaining four tones (F-sharp – B – A – C-sharp) should play an important role somewhere else in the piece. That is not in fact the case, yet all the episodes revolve around those four tones. Schoenberg touched Bartók viscerally. In his *Three Etudes* he declares his intention to write twelve-note music. One of his strangest pieces, *Improvisations,* uses Hungarian folk songs in a twelve-note context. The *Dance Suite* is undoubtedly a step back from dodecaphony, yet even this work couldn't have been written without Bartók's earlier interest in Schoenberg. Schoenberg's innovations

were enormously influential, but subsequent interpretations moulded them in the interpreters' own image. Berg used the twelve-note method differently to Schoenberg. Webern appears very strict at first sight, but in the Cantata No. 1, for instance, not even the beginning is strictly twelve-note. Bartók adopted the system without losing his own voice, not to mention late Stravinsky, Dallapiccola, Petrassi, Nono and many others.

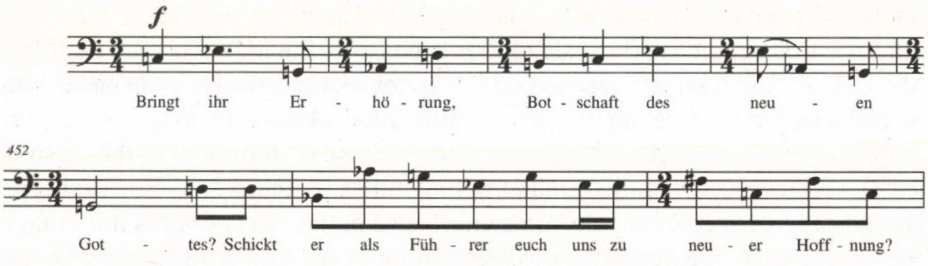
So did Bartók gradually phase out dodecaphony?

Yes. Bartók employed this method right away, whereas Stravinsky didn't start doing so until after Schoenberg's death. Schoenberg's development followed a different trajectory. He came to twelve-note writing in a natural way, and progressed from there on various paths toward the uses of dodecaphony in purely instrumental music as well as in dramatic works. Twelve-note writing is totally appropriate for the story of *Moses and Aaron,* where he was dealing with his own serious inner problems, which were almost schizoid in nature.

Are you talking about the Jewish–Christian problem?

Or, if you prefer, tonal–atonal, dramatic–lyrical, believer–nonbeliever. My impression is that Aaron is a non-believer from the start. To me, Aaron's first utterance sounds outright sarcastic. Thus, this musical language is appropriate for the story. Schoenberg succeeded in writing real theatrical music, which is not typical in dodecaphony. By the way, another reviewer takes me to task for using C-minor and D-minor chords in Act III. For goodness' sake, take a look at the choral parts in the first two acts, and you'll see immediately that Schoenberg intended to write material easily sung that was also easy to learn. So if a professional chorus member or soloist has managed to learn a C-minor melody like this one:

(Ex. 1)



then they can sing that melody even in the midst of a battle. Schoenberg consciously developed this dramatic style in *Moses and Aaron.*

Does that mean that the opera contains tonality?

It contains tonal centres. Schoenberg wanted to become more popular. Indeed, at our rehearsals it started to happen. Believe it or not, people were whistling the melodies in the hallway. The works of Schoenberg's middle period—his most difficult—have simply withstood the test of time. They survived a world war and Zhdanov's decrees; you can safely call them classics.

The part of Moses is mostly Sprechgesang. *How precisely is the pitch fixed in this manner of performance?*

You must sing around the notated pitch. The note-heads are marked with crosses; he first used this way of notation in *Gurrelieder* and later in *Pierrot lunaire*. Yet *Pierrot* is also *Sprechgesang* and each note contains a cross to indicate that. And the style is different—completely expressionistic. The *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* is a slight step back because it, too, is notated on a single line and calls for extremely powerful acting.

Schoenberg wrote other operas, too.

He wrote *Von heute auf morgen*—he just dashed it off. It is a little bit like Berg's *Wozzeck,* though it is a comedy. It hasn't been performed in Hungary yet, but then there are six Strauss operas that have never been performed here. I'm obsessed with the idea that we must play every note written by Strauss, Schoenberg and Debussy. We're almost done with Debussy; all that's left is the full version of *The Martyrdom of St Sebastian.*

Is it your mission to present entire oeuvres?

I agree with Pierre Boulez who says that the minor utterances of a great master are more important than the major works of a lesser talent. We have got a lot of catching up to do. It's sad to think how many works by Schubert we've never played.

What are the principal motives and dramatic climaxes of Moses and Aaron*?*

In Act I, only Scene 2 abounds in action. This is when the chorus (the people) begins to have doubts. Here Schoenberg uses three biblical scenes: the stick turns into a snake, the leper's hand is healed, and the water of the Nile turns into blood. These scenes generate considerable dramatic energy. The people become more active and Moses is pushed somewhat into the background. In Act II, Moses disappears for forty days. On day thirty-nine, some dramatic events happen, all having to do with the Golden Calf: frenzy, jubilation, violence followed by the return of Moses, who destroys the Golden Calf, grinds it up and makes the people drink it. Then he calls Aaron to task. He becomes a little insecure after that; yet to me this dialogue represents the climactic point in the act because it is here that Schoenberg's two personalities clash the most strongly. Not a lot happens in Act III: it is nothing but a court trial. Moses is reflecting on the past events. Aaron is brought in, and Moses launches into a

long religious-philosophical discourse while he accuses Aaron of his crimes: he has betrayed the one eternal God for other gods, the people for other peoples, the Idea for reality, for images, and finally, the Sublime for the Ordinary. Then the soldiers ask: shall we kill him? Moses seems not to have heard the question; he begins another religious-philosophical discourse, at the end of which he says: you know what, let him go; let him live on if he can. Aaron is set free. He takes a step or two, and then God's arrow strikes him dead. If no one else killed Aaron, then God did it. Now the people exit, Moses remains alone and utters his famous phrase that the people will achieve their goal: unity with God. It is clear that Moses is worthless without Aaron. Nor is there anything left for him to do, as the people have started on their journey. Schoenberg left a lot of different textual variants for this act. A whole volume in the complete edition is devoted to the different versions of the text.

How do we know which variant he wanted to keep?

He left two copies of the final version, one in manuscript and one in typescript. Nothing was published during his lifetime; this is a posthumous piece. Only one excerpt, the dance around the Golden Calf, was performed while Schoenberg was alive, and it was so successful that it had to be repeated immediately. But the work was unfinished, so they didn't publish it.

It is open to speculation whether it is because he didn't consider it definitive or because he didn't want to complete it.

You couldn't say that he had run out of inspiration because he wrote a whole series of masterpieces after *Moses and Aaron.* At the Schoenberg Archives in Vienna they have all the sketches. It's clear that he wanted to continue the work.

Could you say that the two-act version has a tragic conclusion, while Act III has a happy ending?

It's certainly a resolution. Aaron dies, so I'm not so sure about the happy ending. But the schizoid situation gets resolved.

Had you ever composed twelve-note music before?

Yes. I think—without being radical about it—that if we take the idea of the equality of the twelve notes a step further, we can create a new kind of tonal centre, one that is totally different from the tonal centres in the old major-minor system. This would not be a regression. I think tonally while using all twelve notes. What comes first is always the idea, the invention, which then generates its own method.

Are you now turned on to composing in this way?

I could write a lot of Schoenberg music—but what for? As I just said, the idea comes first and it generates its own rules. I have a thought and work it out in some way. There are composers who have no ideas at all but are excellent craftsmen, and there are those who think a lot but have problems with developing their thoughts. Like Bruckner for example—he had a lot of ideas but construction was not his forte. I can only compose if I withdraw completely, as I did last summer. I have little chance to do that if I'm an 'office manager'. I have hardly written anything in the past five years: I did some orchestrations on commission—Rachmaninoff songs, Debussy songs, the movements from *Tombeau de Couperin* that Ravel didn't orchestrate, some Liszt, Bartók's Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, Kodály's Twenty Hungarian Folksongs. That's compositional work too, but it's still just substitute activity.

Why do you do orchestrations? Do you feel that some pieces call for it?

Definitely. For instance, in his piano piece "Obermann's Valley," Liszt included markings like *"quasi cello", "quasi flute"*; these show that the composer was already thinking in an orchestral way. But it was very expensive to work with an orchestra. Berlioz went into debt for years after the performance of his Symphonie "Fantastique". Hall rental, copying parts, musicians' salaries...

Shouldn't you let a piano piece remain a piano piece?

Not at all, the two complement each other. I play "Obermann" differently on the piano after having orchestrated it. The same thing is true vice versa. A conductor who doesn't know the piano original of *Pictures at an Exhibition* won't be able to give a good performance of the orchestrated version.

Richter hated Ravel's orchestration.

He hated all transcriptions. But then why did he play Bach's piano concertos; those are transcriptions, too.

Could tonal hearing really be adapted to dodecaphony as you once claimed, switched to it so to speak?

It could, but goodness knows whether it would be worth it. I don't know in what direction music is developing, what we're going to have in a few centuries. Same as with speech: we can make sentences of a complexity unheard of some tens of thousands of years ago.

A lot of people say that tonal music is inherently closer to us, more accessible.

That is true. Tonal music is derived from the overtone system, just as physical matter is derived from Mendeleyev's periodic system. Yet this system, the harmonic series, can produce more than major–minor tonality. All this came about in the 16th century, out of the modal scales. Bach was the first on the way

towards the equalization of the twelve tones, introducing into practice the well-tempered system which, by the way, had been discovered a long time before him. But Bach sent the world a message that you can compose in any key you want, not only in B flat or F. He was a precursor for some trends that later produced some oddities like Scriabin, who attributed a different colour to each tone, etc. But I think that even Bach might have seen colours when he played on harpsichords or organs that were tuned in the well-tempered system, thus discovering things pointing beyond musical substance. Bach even wrote a twelve-note theme (*Well-Tempered Clavier,* Book I, Fugue in B minor). Coming from the well-tempered system, where the distance between the tones is always exactly the same, one hears earlier, even modal, music differently, just as if you're steeped in Schoenberg's and Webern's style, you'll hear a Brahms symphony differently.

How so?

The cross-relation that occurs in the first movement of Brahms's Third Symphony no longer seems strange, but even appears logical. Brahms was a very modern composer; behind his conservative attitudes you discover very progressive thinking.

Or instinct?

You could say that. In any case, when Schoenberg listed his five most important teachers, he mentioned Bach, Mozart and Beethoven in the first circle, and Brahms and Schubert in the second circle. He didn't talk about Wagner.

How did he relate to Wagner?

He was a great fan. His whole family inherited his Wagner mania. The choral parts of *Moses and Aaron* would be unthinkable without the second act of *Meistersinger.*

How did it feel to write Act III? Did Schoenberg as a figure have a paralysing effect? Or did you sit down next to him like an equal?

I felt I was his pupil. He had given me a task to solve. I had to expand a melody he had started to write; yet the accompaniment was already all there. My task was to make sure that the twelve-note row worked both horizontally and vertically without repetitions. As far as my own invention is concerned, I started by working out Aaron's part, the most easily sung melodious vocal moments. Then came Moses, and only then did I check what Schoenberg wanted. Act III can therefore rather be considered my music, with important reflections on Acts I and II.

When you were using actual Schoenberg materials, could you still feel as an independent composer?

Absolutely. To understand what a great master Schoenberg was—that is already an accomplishment. Then it's no longer so difficult to proceed because, although Schoenberg is very strict in demarcating the playing field, there is enormous freedom within that field. So much so that I even created note rows of my own.

The really interesting challenge is when you have to be inventive while bound by rules and laws.

Of course. And I am a law-abiding citizen...

How are we going to refer to this three-act version? Schoenberg-Kocsis? You have to write something on the title page of the score.

Good question: I haven't thought about it. One solution would be to give Act III a separate title like "Aaron's Death"—a title, by the way, that had also occurred to Schoenberg. In one of his letters he raised the possibility of making the continuation a separate piece under that title.

I think that would disrupt the unity of the work.

I don't think so. It would give conductors the option between the two-act and the three-act versions. If they choose the latter, they'll perform *Moses and Aaron* by Schoenberg and *Aaron's Death* by Kocsis. I would have a lot of nerve to say that I finished the opera and now I want to be Schoenberg's co-author. Maybe someone else will want to give it a try and write a better completion. Should that ever happen, I will conduct that version instead of mine. I don't think a lot of people would want to do it, though. Composers are aware that they have moved too far away from the masses and they see tonality as the way that will lead them back to the audience. This is not a generational issue. What Emil Petrovics has said about Schoenberg verbally, younger composers say with their compositions: let us return to tonality! The problem is that you need to be a fantastic talent to pull this off, because the tonal music that is being written these days is like earlier music, only not as good.

The music "that is being written these days" includes your music, too.

The key factor is the appearance of original talents. If such an exceptional figure comes along, it doesn't matter what language they use: originality means that you can use any language whatsoever in a unique, personal way. Who the hell cares today if Rachmaninoff's music is anachronistic? Nobody wrote the way he did. Consequently, he is a first-rate composer, like anyone who does something that hasn't been done before, or something that nobody else would be able to do.

You had a complex task on your hands when you took over the National Philharmonic—it would almost have been easier to start a new orchestra.

The Budapest Festival Orchestra certainly had it easier, in spite of all its detractors. It is easier to start with a clean slate than to bring some order to a crew that was totally full of itself, with a bloated self-image, while declining musically and technically. "True artists don't need to practise," the saying went.

You have succeeded in improving the quality of the orchestra considerably. How long have you come, and what remains to be done?

We're doing pretty well as far as the repertoire is concerned. We play a lot of contemporary music. My predecessors were great musicians, but they had their limitations. Also, their circumstances did not allow them to develop the kind of broad outlook that is typical of Western orchestras. When I took over, it immediately became clear that the French repertoire was missing, as was Bruckner, Baroque music and contemporary music.

But what about this monster with a hundred heads called the orchestra? Where are you in your technical level, knowledge and, above all, attitude? If you have problems, do they have to do with the musicians' discipline, or talent, or age?

Good question. I tried to work with some very old musicians cursed with all sorts of bad habits. There were no results. Everybody knew which players are responsible for the grainy sound, the faulty intonation, the sloppy rhythms. Let me stress that the changes were made in a very humane way. My goal was not to get rid of people, but to make good music. I'm concerned with the music, not the orchestra. Accordingly, the changes took place in 2000 and afterwards, a slow evolution got under way, from a higher starting point. Now the important thing is not to stagnate, because that represents an immediate danger of slipping back. Based on our recent performances, I feel we are climbing higher and higher. I can tell not by the reviews (we hardly get any bad reviews any more), but by the fact that the orchestra is beginning to feel secure in every stylistic period.

How do you help that evolution along?

I don't believe in methods, just as I don't believe in great instrumental gurus...

Yet you have a method too; it can be analysed after the fact. In what way do you ensure that you don't mark time?

Just solve the task at hand. If the rehearsal is not effective enough, if rhythms get distorted—for instance if a dotted rhythm turns into a waltz—then the question arises as to what I should do. I admit that I shout a lot. But there is no other way. Yet this is not about a boss and a group of employees; rather, I can't stand anything that is not directly related to the music. I tolerate no unnecessary decorations, and no bad solutions that devalue the music. We do have some disciplinary problems. One must rehearse as if one were playing at

a concert. Soloists must practise the same way (although many soloists would disagree). Total intensity is needed all the time. Then there is a chance that this attitude will become the default that we can rely on anytime. For if that's not the case, then what do we have to rely on? We can't just hope that a miracle will happen in the solemn mood of the concert.

Have there been many changes in the personnel of the orchestra?

I was always opposed to that, even when working with the Festival Orchestra.

I meant rejuvenation.

You have to do that so gradually it can't be noticed. When I recently conducted all nine Beethoven symphonies in a single day at the Liszt Academy of Music, some of their students sat in the orchestra. Let them learn.

If an orchestra is to be successful internationally, it has to have a great reputation and a strong tradition, or it has to offer something special. What is it that the National Philharmonic is really good at?

We may play Bartók better than anyone. The orchestra can more or less meet the high standards imposed by Bartók. But there are other things that we can do that others can't. I've never heard a Rachmaninoff First Symphony that even comes close to our recording. There are pieces the orchestra loved working on, like Schoenberg's *Pelléas and Mélisande* or Varèse's *Amériques*; but Debussy's *Pelléas* made a strong impression, too. Anything by Schoenberg or the two early Strauss symphonic poems, *Macbeth* and *Aus Italien*. I have never heard a performance of those works that is better than ours. Mahler's Eighth Symphony was greeted by rave reviews. We could also mention my own orchestrations, which are particular to this orchestra. The repertoire is very broad.

An orchestra doesn't have to play everything.

I agree, but I don't believe a Haydn symphony must always be played by small forces. Similarly, you don't have to play Beethoven only on the fortepiano or Bach only on the harpsichord. Historical performance is a very important by-product of music-making, but it is absurd to claim that a symphony orchestra mustn't play a Brandenburg Concerto. Miklós Perényi is right when he says that the viola da gamba can capture certain important things better than the cello, so modern cellists are duty-bound to learn that sound.

You can learn that from early-music players. Have orchestras been influenced by early-music playing?

They have indeed. One can learn that one lives on earth after all, and the opening chorus of the St. Matthew Passion may even have a dance character. But there are also excesses as when the Mozart Requiem is turned into a gavotte...

What kind of a music director are you? They say you're a perfectionist and sometimes you offend people by your irritated comments.

I can't stand sloppiness in rhythm, in proportions, intonation and anything else. I concentrate on the essence with every fibre in my body. How can you reconcile that with tolerance for hostility and laziness? My suspicion is that you can't. An orchestra should keep quiet; there can't be any talking while I work to solve an important problem with an individual or a group.

What does being a conductor mean to you?

Mahler was once asked whether an orchestra could play without a conductor. "Absolutely, Madam," he replied, "but don't tell anyone or I'll lose my job". Karajan, of whom many things may be said (he joined the Nazi party twice), did make a good statement once: an orchestra can play without a conductor but it can't play with style. The sound of an ensemble is developed through sustained work. A lasting success can only be achieved if an orchestra works with the same conductor for a long time. The Budapest Festival Orchestra is a case in point. Of course, the actual results depend on your talent. More and more people say that the Philharmonic sounds like me playing the piano. I can be proud of that. It is my goal to transfer my preferred musical solutions (proportions, rhythmic liberties) to the orchestra. To bring a concrete example: Bartók has a very special way with time, due to *parlando–rubato* and his system of accentuation. This is surprising at first but later becomes second nature, to the point that everything else fades in comparison. The question is: can all this be transferred to orchestral playing? After all, Bartók was first and foremost a pianist. Yet if it can be transferred to quartet playing, it can certainly work with the orchestra as well. This has been proven by our recent recordings: the Bartókian spirit, which is based on these characteristics and without which Bartók's music is not Bartók's music, can indeed be transferred to the major orchestral works. Not to mention the metronome: it boggles the mind how Bartók's metronome markings can be ignored, although they make the character of the piece crystal clear. If we play the Barcarolle from *Out of Doors* slower than the metronome marking (and unfortunately this is often the case) than the boat stops rocking and we are left with a completely characterless slow movement. Or if we play the Chase more slowly than marked, it turns into a laboured effort, where you feel the perspiration; and that has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chase. You've got to try, it's very difficult but not impossible; I'm speaking from experience. The same goes for the orchestra. Without a conductor, you can't make music with style or focus on what is essential. You spend part of your energy trying to hear one another, which is impossible beyond a certain distance. The conductor, then, has first to keep everything together to give the performance a style. An orchestra cannot do an

"accelerando" together without a conductor, but even an "accelerando" can become part of a style, as in an Italian "stretto" or in a gradual tempo change that takes place over a longer stretch, and in such cases the conductor's role is crucial. In a true rehearsal process—one that is not based on hierarchy or showing off power—setting basic musical parameters becomes a matter of style.

One has to pay attention to proportions of tempo and dynamics, the subtle nuances of handling time that cannot be written down. Toscanini was right when he said that all you need to do is look to the music. Be faithful to the score, indeed, but so was Furtwängler when he insisted that the really important things happen between the notes. The two are not even mutually exclusive. The handling of time grows out of the work itself. One has to make sure the musical units and their interrelationships are in order—and the units themselves have to be well defined. All this has to come from a single person. It takes a single individual to shape the performance and to reflect on what has happened in the piece so far. The conductor can prevent rushing and tedium. This is true on a larger scale as well. When we played the nine Beethoven symphonies in a single marathon, playing No. 6 after the first five was a completely different experience from playing No. 6 by itself. It turned out, by the way, that the Sixth is by far the most interesting of the symphonies.

Why?

In the Sixth, we have genius without the composer forcing his will. Beethoven always forces his will a little, especially if we compare him to Mozart, although Beethoven shouldn't really be compared to anyone.

Why did you do the Beethoven marathon?

I wanted to see what light the different symphonies shed on one another when played in sequence. The First is a Mozartian masterpiece, but it fades next to the Second, which has so much more character. The Fourth is perfect, yet it is a step back after the Third, as is the Fifth. And how vulgar the Fifth is, when placed next to the Sixth. Even the Ninth cannot eclipse the Eighth, because it is so perfect.

Let's talk about musical life in Hungary. What tasks do you see before yourself? We know what the problems are: with the audience, the lack of money, musical education, etc. What could be done?

A piano in every home.

OK, and now for something more realistic?

We have to bring back music as a required part of school curricula. We cannot let go of the Kodály method, for it is very important. It is easy to criticize the Liszt Academy, but the problems are with elementary music training, which is

starting to atrophy completely. The Finns have achieved very serious results, even though the population is half of ours and they probably have fewer talents. But they have adopted the Kodály method.

You are in a responsible position. What can you do?

We have to make the musical career attractive instead of enveloping it in some mysterious cloud. It is in part a PR issue. We should spend as much on culture as the Finns do; after all, it is not because of our brilliant agriculture, industry and political culture that the world takes notice of us, but because we have a few good orchestras, we have a Dezső Ránki, a Miklós Perényi, an András Schiff and many young talents.

You do a lot of different things. Just being a pianist alone would be enough to fill your life. How can you reconcile it all?

You have as much time as you make for yourself. Yet what is certain is that you can only do one thing with maximum intensity. You can only achieve good results if you have no superfluous thoughts in your brain. You shouldn't take on so many tasks that you become completely overwhelmed.

Is your environment, your family, your background responsible, or have you the energy of many men?

You just have to sit down and do your work. You have to have a sense of responsibility. That it is I who has to do this work. I don't do mainstream stuff that other people can do just as well. I don't play Schumann's piano music, because Pollini, Argerich and Zimmermann are so good, why should I be No. 76. I orchestrate Rachmaninoff songs instead, or play Bartók's Twenty Hungarian Folksongs, which no one else is playing.

Do you feel that to be your mission?

It's more like filling lacunae. Doing what only I can do. There is time for everything. Sometimes I tinker at home for hours on end. My family, while not workaholics, also want to get to the essence of things. My oldest son is studying his thirty-fifth language. He already knows Icelandic, Coptic, Samoyed, Ural-Altaic languages. And I won't have peace until I learn Rachmaninoff's Sonata in D minor. Not to perform it, just to know it.

What else do you like to do besides music?

Many things. Cooking. Lately I've been fascinated by Japanese and Indian cuisine. But even a consommé is no easy matter. I'm also interested in sturgeon. My youngest son watched Mr Mayer in Tapolca clean a Balaton starry sturgeon. You know how big a starry sturgeon is? ❧

Sviatoslav Richter in Hungary

János Mácsai Talks with Dezső Ránki

This conversation took place after the release of a fourteen-disc set of recordings of Richter's live performances in Hungary by Hungarian Radio and the Budapest Music Center. Richter had an enormous influence on Hungarian musical life. He first stepped onto a Hungarian concert platform in 1954 and his last concert was recorded by Hungarian Radio in 1993. In the four decades between, Richter regularly appeared in Hungary (sometimes without notice), giving sixty concerts altogether; twenty-eight in the capital and the rest in cities throughout the country either as a soloist, chamber musician or accompanist. Many pieces in the new set do not appear elsewhere. Richter was a major figure in the story of a generation of Hungarian pianists—Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff and Dezső Ránki among them—who began their careers in the 1970s. Ránki, who knew Richter and assembled a large private collection of his recordings, contributed to the editing process.

Mácsai János: *Clearly the box of 14 discs is especially interesting for anyone who attended his concerts. But what possible reason otherwise could there be for such a large-scale undertaking, given today's saturated CD market?*

Dezső Ránki: I believe that Richter's playing on his recordings—not just in the flesh, so to speak—would have a profound effect on anyone, and that goes also for those who never heard him play live. Of course those of us who *were* present at his concerts could be wrong about this; though, as it happens, I do have childhood memories of listening to him on the radio, and I can recall what a phenomenal effect he had on me. And the impact he had on me when I was a twelve- or thirteen-year-old was no less strong than when I was in my

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János Mácsai
is a musicologist, a restorer of keyboard instruments and presenter for MR3 Bartók Rádió, the classical music channel of Hungarian Radio.

Concerts and Recordings

Sviatoslav Richter's scrupulously kept diary shows that he gave almost 3,600 concerts and recitals during his career. He played over 800 works by around 60 composers, and his repertoire spanned the Baroque period to the contemporary. He performed every important piano concerto, and chamber music, too, was an essential part of his art.

In Budapest, he first performed in March 1954 in his 39th year, and 60 Hungarian concerts over four decades followed at more or less regular intervals. Besides Moscow, it was only in Czechoslovakia that he gave more. Richter took to the Budapest stage for the last time on November 9, 1993. He performed on 28 occasions as a soloist in Budapest and on 13 others in various Hungarian cities. He was a soloist with 11 orchestras and accompanied other soloists and singers—among them his wife Nina Dorliac, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Yuri Bashmet—on eight occasions.

Budapest audiences were huge fans, and he gladly came to Hungary. With few exceptions, Hungarian Radio recorded everything that Richter played here. At the beginning, all his concerts and recitals were broadcast and later, too, there were a few. But from his 1973 Bach evening onwards, he did not permit live broadcasts. Only after a rigorous screening did he allow recorded concerts to be broadcast; after his concerts, he decided which could and which could not be included. The joint release by Hungarian Radio and BMC running to 14 discs respects Richter's intentions, and only recordings which Richter himself approved are included.

What marks Richter's repertoire is that he only played pieces which interested him in some way or other. With the exception of Bach's *Well-tempered Klavier* and the

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thirties and forties. Those early impressions are still so vivid that I'm sure that a new listener today would have a similar reaction.

It's not by chance that Hungarian Radio and BMC asked you to select the material: you are not only among the obviously most qualified, but also a passionate collector of Richter recordings. It is likely that every one of his recordings has passed through your hands. How many Richter recordings do you have?

I can't say for sure because there are a lot of multiple releases, pirate recordings and so on. At any rate there are more than four hundred CDs of Richter. It is certain that over 250 are individual recordings. Very few were made in the studio; most are live performances. Although Richter was not terribly keen on the studio, for a period he did make a series of recordings there. This was untypical. But these studio performances exist and are very good, even if they lack the kind of spontaneity which sparks the same feelings as a concert does. There are the studio recordings of the *Well-Tempered Clavier,* lots of Schubert

second volume of Debussy's Preludes, he never recorded or played entire series; not even if it was the composer's intention that the work should be played as a whole. So there is no complete version of his of Chopin's Etudes, for example, or the Preludes. Over the years, he managed to include almost every major work by Beethoven in his programmes, although he left several (and otherwise popular) works unrecorded, even some of the sonatas he otherwise often played. This selective approach is reflected in his Hungarian concerts, too, which have been edited with particular care. The points of view of atmosphere and style were determining factors. Musical considerations such as key signatures—even in encores—also played a part in how the series was assembled. The fourteen discs are a representative selection of Richter's art, and not only in terms of repertoire: they also reflect how Richter's playing changed over the decades. Richter is among artists whose performance style is exceptionally original, individual, and recognizable even after a few notes. Yet beyond this spiritual unity much changed, matured, crystallized and deepened during the course of his life.

A taste of the programmes on the 14 discs:

'50s: Schumann A minor Piano Concerto (State Philharmonic Orchestra, Ferencsik), Bach *Well-tempered Klavier,* C Minor French Suite, Prokofiev's 8th Sonata, works by Ravel, Schubert C Minor Sonata, works by Liszt; **'60s:** Beethoven Op 22 B Major Sonata, Op 101 A Major Sonata, Schubert 'Wanderer' *Fantasy,* Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues, Prokofiev Visions Fugitives, Chopin Scherzos, Debussy Preludes Vol. 1 and Rachmaninoff Preludes; **'70s:** Bach *Well-tempered Klavier* Vol. 2, Debussy *Images* Vol. 1, Schubert A Major Sonata, Beethoven Sonatas (Op 2/1 F Minor, 10/3 D Major, 14/1 E Major, 26 A Major); **'80s:** Works by Frank and Szymanovski, Tchaikovsky Piano Pieces, Rachmaninoff Études-Tableaux; **'90s:** Grieg Lyrical Pieces ❧

sonatas, smaller Tchaikovsky pieces and piano concertos. At any rate, it is not surprising that he didn't like making studio recordings. When he recorded the Liszt piano concertos with Kirill Kondrashin in 1961—if I remember correctly—he played one, as far as I know, in ten full takes and the other in eleven because he did not want them spliced. They are great performances. Only 25–30 CDs-worth of studio performances exist altogether.

My work on the release started with my listening to all the recordings made in Hungary. I got all the material from Hungarian Radio and I compared them with all the recordings available. I compiled suggestions with certain criteria in mind, and, on this basis, ranked them using symbols I designed for the purpose. Top of the list was material which must not, by any means, be excluded because it was material which did not exist elsewhere. Next in line were performances which were particularly good or, from the point of view of the collector, important. There are those which, from the Hungarian perspective, are interesting but are lacking in some way or other, say, the recording quality. In

any event, there are lots of things which I took into account, and I wrote down my opinions and handed over my list to Hungarian Radio. But the editing itself was done by them, mainly by Márta Perédi, I believe.

As far as I know, you have respected Richter's wish for what he himself did not want released or didn't allow to be broadcast. But was he always right?

Three such examples spring to mind. One was a concert in Győr in 1986 of which only the Diabelli Variations were allowed to be broadcast because the piano was so bad that it caused problems even for him in the other pieces. The second was a concert in the Vigadó, the Szymanovski sonata, which I think was very good, but unfortunately he did not allow it to be broadcast. Certain parts of the second volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier,* which he gave permission for, appear. He specified which parts could be included and which could not.

Did you have suggestions which, in the end, did not get into the final release?

The Hungarian material is enough for around fifty discs; around one third made it to the final cut. It was impossible to know in advance how many discs could be pressed from the funds available. The number that appeared in the end was more than anyone could have counted on: fourteen discs. The first idea was to group the editions by the composers; but doing so would only have been justified on commercial grounds because discs are usually sold on shelves by composer. Luckily the recordings of the selected concerts follow each other chronologically. My feeling is that this works well and I agree with it.

Before you could have attended any of Richter's concerts, as a child learning the piano, you had certainly heard of him. Richter was a living legend in Budapest. What did they say about him in this period? And what was your experience of getting to know him?

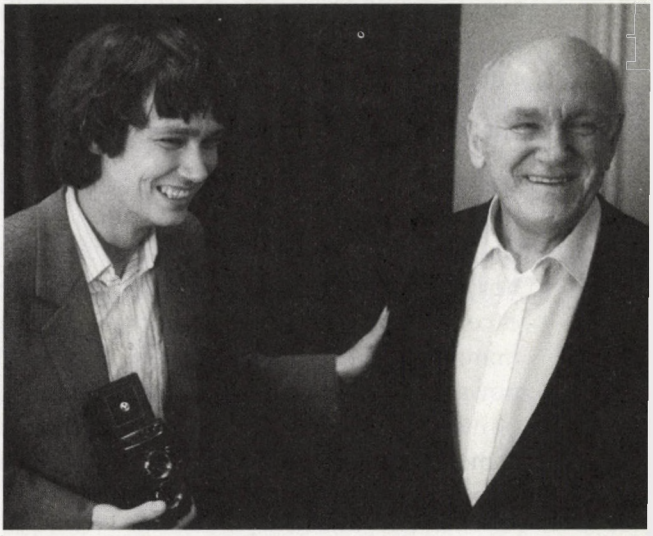
I remember reactions of all sorts, some of them hostile because his playing was far from the style of the "good little piano student" which older piano teachers liked. But his playing had such a powerful effect that most people, whatever he did, accepted him. Besides the effect of his extraordinary personal charisma, the deepest impression he made on me was that everything happened precisely when it should have done when he played. He was musically concrete. There was none of this generally "beautiful playing" or the "beautiful formation" of phrases which play to audiences' expectations. Rather, his phrasing was exceedingly precise and every note and dynamic arrived exactly when they should have done. When you feel inside: right, now is the time to explode or now is the time to wane, it all happened just at the right time. For example, there is a stereotypical agogic when the first note is elongated. Even if it is only a melody comprising a few notes. This is mainly fashionable for string players but pianists have got into the habit, too. I personally think that after a while it gets really annoying because it puts everything out of joint and changes your expectations: after enough exposure to

this kind of playing you come to expect it to happen and it no longer has any of its originally intended effect. It is not that I don't like this style because Richter doesn't do it but rather I myself feel this way, too. This is perhaps one of the biggest tasks that a musician must live up to. This kind of precision. The whole piece should unfold in such a way that every single detail within me is in its ideal place. This was one of the most important things which one could learn from him.

Richter with Éva Lakatos, Edit Klukon and Dezső Ránki

At the same time you can observe how—mainly in the left hand—there are minute delays out of which gigantic emphases are formed. Among other things, perhaps it is from this that the piano sounded so huge under his hands.

I think that the sound was huge because of his incomparable physique. And, in spite of this, he never appeared rough thanks to the extraordinary plasticity of his build and his speed and adaptiveness. Musical talent, charisma and ability to concentrate were paired with this physique in an utterly exceptional way.



With Zoltán Kocsis

Is it possible to do something to 'train' a person's physique to the demands of the piano? Can you train like a weight-lifter or is it hopeless if you don't have those gifts?

Certainly you can do a lot to develop yourself but only if you have the right qualities to begin with. Nothing exists in life for which you don't need an exceptional gift if you want to do it well. There are those who practise like a lunatic and still can't play certain pieces and there are those who, with less

work, achieve everything. The biggest lottery though is how and when this quality is coupled with the kind of spirit and emotional gift that he possessed. He was capable of capturing two thousand people and keeping a hold on them. There are exceptional people who are born with that ability.

How special were Richter's natural gifts, for example his memory? This is the stuff of legend.

This was a special gift of his, though when he was old he played from the score, saying that he did not want to waste time on learning a piece from memory. I think it is really neither here nor there whether someone plays from the music or from memory. The reason I mostly choose not to play from music in a concert is that it disturbs me to constantly look up. But sometimes I like to look at the score because it can be an inspiration during a performance. Lots of musicians make a sport out of playing or conducting entire operas from memory. This is not the point. Otto Klemperer, once asked why he used a score when by then most conductors didn't, replied, "Because I can read the score."

Richter was often accused of going to extremes: extreme dynamics and tempi. This also applied to smaller matters, too: he sometimes held a pause for so long that one began to think that he had forgotten the piece.

Yes, he was like that. He took a lot of things to their extreme conclusion. But it is important that there was nothing artful in what he did. It wasn't contrived. I don't know whether there is anything here to analyse.

His personality simply manifested itself at the keyboard?

Yes, absolutely faithfully. That is why he has such an effect on us.

How rare is that?

Very. I don't really know any individual who is comparable. There are exceptional artists who are, of course, on the same level as Richter, but who manifest themselves differently. Earlier I listened to a lot of recordings—nowadays, unfortunately, I don't have much time—and I experienced only four or five musicians who, if I listened to their recordings again and again had the same, if not an even bigger, impact on me than when I first listened to them. In other cases a second listening was not at all interesting.

Who are those four or five?

Callas, Furtwängler, Michelangeli and Richter. No one else occurs to me.

Compared to his great competitors, Horowitz and Rubinstein, in what way can he be distinguished?

Horowitz was a giant artist and in the best sense of the meaning—a clown. I'm

crazy about him. I love how he fooled around in rehearsals—he was undoubtedly amazing, but very different from Richter, who took everything seriously. If you see the portrait film of Horowitz then you can see how much he enjoyed the situation. He fooled about in the rehearsal and recording, and I don't believe he would have found it insulting to be described in this way. He too was an incredible person and he produced wonderful things—for example his Schumann is unbelievably gorgeous. I don't know how far Richter took himself seriously—I think he did, although he was a very modest person. But he took what he did very seriously. Probably the reason that he had such an effect on us is that he was simply at one with what he did.

Did he have a sense of humour? I never saw him smile while he bowed, for example.

Do you think that a musician these days who goes out to bow and smiles, really smiles? In most cases it's a mannerism. He did not lie. It is a huge task to go out on to the platform and perform something. After performing Liszt's Sonata in B minor why would you smile? Still, I remember that after playing one or two short encores, such as a Debussy prelude, he smiled. I think there was a lot of humour and self-irony in him. And he was a very curious and open person. Once he asked me what I was playing or studying and I told him, one of the Beethoven sonatas. I was in my early twenties. He replied: at such a young age? At this age you should be playing Xenakis! Otherwise I did not talk with him very often; sometimes I met him in the green room after his concerts. Once he was present at a concert I gave in Palermo, and afterwards wrote me a very kind letter telling me in detail his opinion of my playing.

And what was it?

I had played a Haydn sonata and he wrote that he saw the work completely differently but thought that what I had done was convincing. I also played Debussy or Ravel, and he didn't like that, but the Liszt Mephisto Waltz he liked very much. I recall that I felt that it had not worked out too well on that particular occasion. But that's a subjective thing.

To return to honesty: how hard is it not to lie on the concert platform?

This is a difficult question if you ask first of all what counts as lying. At a certain time a person brings himself to a suitable state so as to be able to play a piece in an apposite way. In rare cases do the two things coincide that I really want to play that piece for myself and I'm required to do so. But the whole thing in the end is artificial, though with many years of practice you can acquire the ability to achieve to the full the mood required for the given piece just when it is necessary. And at this point you can begin the argument about whether this is really lying or not. Then comes the next question, namely that you play a piece written by someone else and have to inhabit it. In the final analysis this

is acting, in the good sense of the word: naturally, acting not with words but with musical gestures, musical tools of expression. A piece is learned because certain things are awakened in the performer who feels commonality with it and curiosity and wants to play it for others, too. He must make the narrative of feeling his own and recall it at the appropriate moment. In the strict sense of the term, this can be called a lie.

But were a performer not to do this then he would be unable to work.

Of course. This is what a performance is about. But if someone plays in such a way that his understanding of the piece has not been honestly internalized and that the gestures are put on for the benefit of the audience, then this is clearly a lie. And this will be felt by the audience. You may get away with it for a short time but soon you'll be rumbled.

Then why do performers do this so often? Do they do it to compensate for a lack of personal weight?

They are either trying to compensate or they believe that their own personality is lacking in some way or it is not up to the task; and they hope the theatrics will make for a bigger success.

Many think that there are no longer such weighty figures as Richter. Nor, perhaps, do they want such significant personalities, even if many complain about the lack of great conductors. Are there really none or we just don't notice them? Or times have changed?

What I do know is that I don't care what people generally want or don't want. Something is either good or it isn't. Whether people happen to like Monet, does this influence whether he is good or bad? If a weighty personality—someone like Richter—were to step out from the fog that would change the whole situation. But nowadays we don't really come across such figures. There is something about lifestyle throughout the world which does not favour the emergence of such figures. Earlier people gave themselves more time to absorb such things. Earlier conductors committed themselves to an orchestra for decades and created their own style—such as Furtwängler with the Berlin Philharmonic or Mengelberg with the Concertgebouw. Now so-called travelling conductors turn up, at best for a week, and then go on to the next one.

Is this just for business reasons or is there an artistic imperative, too?

You can earn more this way. Allowing enough time to prepare is a secondary consideration these days. I remember that once I played the Liszt A major Concerto with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and apart from the dress rehearsal I was given just fifteen minutes rehearsal. The piece itself lasts twenty. What is certain is that nowadays I do not have such profound experiences as I

had at the concerts of the old greats. So much has become superficial. All too often these days people just want to get over the experience very quickly.

As a performer do you feel that the level of concentration now is different than in your early days?

A lot of the time, yes. But if I am able to give myself over entirely then I start to feel that concentration intensifies and something of what used to be emerges. People have the desire; it's just tougher breaking down the walls. And of course you have to avoid getting worked up about it because then you won't perform the piece as you wish. There is a bit of luck involved, too.

Can some kind of renewal be expected? Or can we say that maybe the traditional consumption of music which developed over the past two hundred years is over? Habits change according to the period, after all.

I often feel that when, in the usual way, someone puts on their tails (these days a black tunic with a clerical high collar is more the trend), goes out, bows, plays the usual regulation-length programme, well or badly, this has become so stale in many cases that certainly something else should be done. There are times when these conventions don't unduly bother me, but most of the time they do. Of course, the most important thing is that I play pieces which I played earlier in my career with as much joy as ever, as well as learning new ones. It is possible that in a more intimate, more relaxed environment, with a more improvised format, perhaps reacting even during the performance to how something works out, shaping the programme as you go along, trying a piece several times—this would be good. Perhaps this would be a good direction, at least for me.

Richter felt something of that.

Yes. He liked very much small halls and rarely gave the programming in advance; indeed, the date of the concert was often unexpected. He was one of those—indeed, I can't think of anyone else—who could allow himself this. That is why in his late period he hardly ever played with orchestras because then it wasn't possible to do this. At most, he played with chamber orchestras such as the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra or with the Moscow Soloists. He, of course, would have wanted a lot of rehearsals.

How was Richter received abroad?

He first performed in America in 1960 and thereafter appeared there only a few times. They were crazy about his concerts. He was an incredible success. But thereafter he didn't return. It sounds funny, but he said he couldn't stand hearing American English. Once he went to Germany just before I did, and I was shocked by their reaction to my eager enquiry about how they found his playing. *"Ganz gut,"* they replied with moderate enthusiasm. Well, how could

they say that? You could say that it was unbearable or unbelievable, but *that*? And the situation in Vienna was even worse; as far as I know, he didn't like playing there—he thought the audiences were very arrogant. At the same time he very much liked playing in Prague, and of course here as well. France was also an important venue for him. They also adored him in Italy, where he gave most of his concerts abroad. In Japan, they built a concert hall specifically for him in the middle of a forest.

If there was an accusation against him, it was that his playing was of uneven quality. That he was unpredictable and was capable of giving weaker concerts, too.

I think he was as unpredictable as anyone else. Just as he was a direct conduit for the music, he did not resort to the kind of defence mechanism which is common in today's recording process whereby mistakes are automatically covered up. If something went slightly wrong then the whole movement could slip, and not just technically. But who cares? I think it is indifferent whether we are talking of a note struck mistakenly or of this kind of slip. It belongs to the same category. Naturally, there was unevenness. Thank God—he wasn't a machine. By the way, he was the precise opposite of Michelangeli, who really played everything with computer-like precision and was absolutely perfect (in spite of this he had an enormous personality). I don't think we should spend too much time thinking about these things; my feeling is that we don't need to analyse this.

Was there something in Richter's art which influenced your own playing?

Put that way, no. But there were times when his example strengthened my own ideas and others when, though it had a huge impact on me, and from him I accepted it, I had quite different ideas. Thank God we're all different.

Which composers do you like to hear him play and which less so?

The composer whom, shall we say, I least like to listen to Richter playing is Mozart. I don't feel that his way of playing Mozart is fully on target. But he himself was not totally at peace with Mozart. When it comes to Beethoven, he hits the nail on the head. I love listening to his Schumann in spite of the fact that I have a rather different approach to him. Perhaps his Chopin is not the most convincing either but Rachmaninoff is and Tchaikovsky even more so. Prokofiev was incredible in his hands but you could say that of perhaps all Russian composers. He was capable of showing gorgeous things in Brahms.

If I'm correct, you like him playing Romantic music. But there were great interpretations of classical composers, too. For example Haydn.

Yes, yes. But there is no such thing as a piece which exists independently of anyone, or an ideal performance. For a piece of music to come to life it needs somebody. Someone through whose nervous system and feelings it is realized, and

then it gains individuality. Looked at this way, it is really a moot point whether I like how he plays it or not, and even if I think that this is not entirely my world done this way, what we get is still of such significance that it is worth listening to.

Is it possible for a force of Richter's magnitude to come forward today? He did not observe the usual social obligations, fiercely rejected the media, refused to give interviews, did not speak from the concert platform, shut himself off from all that would normally be obligatory—and without which it is perhaps impossible to succeed these days.

I certainly see that if today's musicians fail to satisfy the expectations as regards this commonly expected garbage then it really is harder for them to succeed. It is certain that when Richter appeared lots of people had the desire to be affected by Richter's kind of aura. Luckily, a receptive audience was present. The audience we had in the 50s, 60s and 70s was ideal for this.

What were the expectations?

There was a greater interest in having these sorts of common experiences. First of all, people actually went to concerts. They went for the music and they were able to afford tickets. Today this is far less so.

I remember that at the end of the 70s there was such a huge crowd in front of the Liszt Academy of Music for a concert that the trolley bus couldn't get past and the traffic came to a standstill. Lots of people were left outside chanting Richter, Richter! Police turned up and used teargas. Another case was Menuhin.

There was some kind of crowd hysteria at Richter concerts, but better that than something else.

Now that we've reached past the story of Richter, what is your opinion: is there a process of derivation going on owing to the opportunity provided by recordings? Will there be a Richter model or experience for the next generation? Just as in literature—at least I hope—young writers will always have their Petőfi or Kosztolányi experience.

That can undoubtedly be said of some great performers, but really only of a few—mainly those I've already mentioned. In their case, even since their deaths, their recordings have been and are being constantly reissued. And there is demand for them. But I must say that while it is of great significance that the performing art should stand on the thick pillars of great personalities like these, the most important thing is that our work should go on. It is not the level which is the most important—although this is not beside the point—but that we should do it. ❧

Paul Griffiths

In the Native Idiom

Bartók New Series on the Hungaroton Label

Is Bartók still a Hungarian composer? The question is raised by the first releases in an astonishing recording project, the *Bartók New Series,* which is coming out on the revivified Hungaroton label—or, rather, that question is raised not so much by the releases themselves (which answer it powerfully in the affirmative) as by the notion of a complete recorded edition as a domestic endeavour, involving a Hungarian company and, at least so far, exclusively Hungarian artists. Surely, one might think, Bartók has long been a universal figure, needing no promotion from his home country's National Cultural Fund (the main sponsor of the series, according to its informative website, www.bartoknewseries.com) and not necessarily benefitting from being confined to his compatriots among performers.

However, the universe has not been too clever in recognizing its treasures. For instance, the *Two Pictures* for orchestra have been recorded over the years by innumerable conductors of Hungarian origin, from Eugene Ormandy and Antal Doráti to Ádám Fischer and Zoltán Kocsis, but the only non-Hungarians to have committed themselves to this score in recent times would seem to be Pierre Boulez (the solitary foreign conductor to have recorded a lot of Bartók's works, many of them twice), Riccardo Muti and James Conlon. The example could be multiplied: most of the songs and choruses, as well as important early compositions, have not been recorded since the last complete edition Hungaroton put out, forty years ago. There are, of course, works that are solidly placed in the international repertory: the quartets, the concertos, the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, *Bluebeard's Castle* and *The Miraculous Mandarin.* But much of Bartók remains Hungarian by default, as performers from elsewhere hesitate to approach music they feel

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requires local knowledge. Hungarian musicians are thus left in charge, and perhaps the indisputable quality of their performances in so many cases has at least as much to do with familiarity as with the possession of some intangible connection to their national 'heritage'.

Yet one must pause, since there is one thing that decidedly and indissolubly links Hungary's performing musicians with the country's great composer: the fact of having Hungarian as a mother tongue. For though vocal music represents a rather small proportion of the output—seven out of the thirty-one CDs in the new series are occupied by it—Bartók often has his instruments speaking, or singing, in Hungarian, as Kocsis, the new series's performing mastermind, has observed:

> I think music exceeds language. Yet at the same time language remains important... I can't imagine the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta or the Divertimento without some connection with language being present in the performance.

And again:

> Most of the piano works require you to be Hungarian or Eastern European.

It might be hard even for a Hungarian speaker to say what Kocsis has the players of the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra singing in his recording of the two aforementioned orchestral works (HSACD 32510), yet certainly they seem to be singing something, with intensity and point. Tempo has a lot to do with this. Where the first movement of the Music for Strings is nearly always done rather more slowly than the composer indicated, both in his metronome marking and in the duration he gave for this movement in the score, Kocsis takes the composer at his word (or, rather, at his number) and thereby finds in this music an extraordinary panting anxiety. This is, it must be said, no longer an 'Andante tranquillo', as Bartók called it in spite of his numerical indications, but as an 'Andante nervoso' it seems to be telling the music's powerful and disturbing truth. The fact that it clocks in at excellently the composer's prescribed length of 6' 30" may be a token of its veracity. When it comes to the finale, Bartók's 5'40" is unlikely to be attained on this planet, and Kocsis's players show some signs of rush in getting to the end in 6' 27". Nevertheless, this is altogether a driving and fully expressive performance of one of Bartók's central masterpieces, coupled with a cheering account of the relatively overlooked Divertimento and with a beautifully fresh and engaging performance of the Hungarian Sketches—a minor work, no doubt, but one that turns out here to have a lot of typically Bartókian comedy and character.

The same point about language is made time and again by the recordings for the new series of the quartets (HSACD 32513-14), works that must hold a key position in any Bartók project, and that here are presented at a supreme level by a group of distinguished Hungarian artists who now play together as the Mikrokosmos Quartet: Gábor Takács-Nagy, Zoltán Tuska, Sándor Papp and Miklós Perényi. These are glorious names in the recent history of chamber music, Takács-Nagy, for example, being the founder leader of the Takács Quartet, and Perényi a musician who has been threading a warm and wonderful line on his cello for almost half a century. By the time these recordings were made, in 2008, they had been playing together for a decade, with Bartók at the centre of their

repertory, which may be why they sound so totally integrated. Somehow they achieve that while being quite independent as musicians; for example, Takács-Nagy's rare delicacy—supported, never trammelled, by his authority and exactness—contrasts nicely with the more forthright style of his fellow violinist Tuska (and one notices how brilliantly Bartók creates opportunities for two at the top of the texture). But the great virtue of the ensemble's integration is that it is so thoroughly integrated with the music, that the musicians understand how these quartets drive simultaneously along four lines and along one, that every nuance works to the dynamism of the whole, that nothing seems to be speaking here but the music itself.

No doubt for these players, as for other Hungarian musicians, it is a close association with Bartók's works that has done most to bring them to a peak of attainment, but there is, too, this matter of how the music expresses itself, and in what language. On many occasions in these performances one has the impression that Judith is singing through Takács-Nagy's violin, or *Bluebeard* through Perényi's cello—not just because this is the same composer with certain qualities of melodic style that will fold over from one work into another, but rather because Bartók's imagination was impregnated with the rhythms and phrasing of the language he spoke, which was also, of course, the language he heard on many of his ethnological expeditions. The Mikrokosmos Quartet remind us that folksong is an art not of abstract tones but of sung words, and therefore that words will be inscribed into any music, even instrumental music, that takes folksong as its basis or model. (Perhaps, therefore, the ideal performers of Bartók's music would have to be polyglot speakers of Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak, with touches of Ukrainian and Arabic thrown in.)

Another striking feature of these quartet recordings is how Bartók emerges as great ancestor of the next Hungarian generation, for swarming passages in several of the quartets look forward to Ligeti's micropolyphony and sudden outbursts to Kurtág's grammar of gesture. Very possibly we are dealing here not with a gene line but with an inheritance discovered by the heirs, who were exposed to—and wanted to align themselves with—Bartók more than any other forebear. But again it is tempting to interpret these alliances as partly linguistic, facilitated by a shared language, with its particularities of rhythm and stress.

This splendid album is one of the few in the series, presently half-complete, not to be touched by the musicianship of Kocsis. The series's six volumes of solo piano music republish the outstanding recordings he made for Philips in the 1980s and 1990s, with the addition of a very few tidbits, and the two early concertos—the Rhapsody, Op.1, and the Scherzo, Op. 2—are also repeated from recordings he made during that period, with Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra. Now they are offered on a disc (HSACD 32504) with a new recording of the 'Stefi Geyer' violin concerto featuring Barnabás Kelemen as soloist and Kocsis as conductor, with the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra. Kocsis and this same team are also responsible for the other orchestral works, recorded in most cases at the Palace of Arts in a sequence that began in 2005. Among the albums that have been released so far, one (HSACD 32506)

includes the Dance Suite along with the early Second Suite and some tangy Romanian items.

Right from its start—the rolling and skipping cello phrase sung out to harp accompaniment at the opening of the Second Suite—one can hear how a closeness to language, spoken and sung, is going to be important. Sound matters here as much as rhythm. Bartók's sense of the bizarre or grotesque—vibrantly present in Kocsis's orchestral recordings, without any ostentation—is helped by a controlled rawness in the timbre, especially of woodwind instruments. The same is true of the music's humour, which is often inseparable from its weirdness, in a rich combination of comic and sinister. (One wonders if the composer was a fan of the horror films of his time.) These recordings also force one to notice the importance to the Bartókian mix of fugato, even in a work as youthful as the Second Suite—how the comedy of imitation is broadened as different instrumental colours run after one another. Works that might easily be categorized as minor—the Romanian Dance that Bartók based on local types and the Romanian Folk Dances he wrote as direct transcriptions—bloom now with character.

So does the Dance Suite. Another welded paradox comes out here, along with, and linked to, the joining of humour, uncanniness and learning: the clasping together of rural and urban. Bartók found his sources, of course, in the countryside, and especially in remote villages, where perhaps his recording apparatus would have been seen as an outlandish contraption. But this peasant music gave him, among other things, vigorous ostinatos that he could rework as the music of city streets, as well as a pentatonicism he could bring forward as a relic of the primeval human past. What he found in far-flung Transylvania turned out to have immediate relevance to his own experience as a man of Budapest. This is the message of *The Miraculous Mandarin,* but it is the message, too, of the Dance Suite in Kocsis's urgent recording. As with the quartets, these orchestral performances will set the standard for some time to come. ❧

CLOSE-UP

Ivan Sanders

Going His Own Way

Michael Scammell, *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic.* New York: Random House, 2009, 689 pp., illustrated.

Michael Scammell's biography of Arthur Koestler is an extraordinarily thorough, densely detailed, and still lucid and literate account of the man, the writer and thinker. He is one biographer who almost knows more about his subject than the subject himself ever did—and this despite the fact that Koestler wrote two volumes of autobiography, a book of memoirs and dozens of personal essays. Because of the prodigious amount of research he has done and the vast material he unearthed over a long period of time, Scammell is in a position not only to catch Koestler's factual errors but to reflect on the curious omissions and lacunae in his versions of his life story.

The Hungarian-born Arthur Koestler is one of those literary figures who over the years has been either overpraised or underrated. He is still often referred to as one of the great minds of the twentieth century, a preeminent public intellectual of the nineteen-forties, fifties and sixties, a formidable debater and polemicist, and a worthy contemporary of Sartre, Camus, Orwell, Huxley, Malraux, all of whom he knew well. But by a different estimate, his fiction is too calculated and idea-driven, his books on scientific theory and history are those of a gifted dilettante, and his forays, late in life, into the realm of parapsychology, the work of an eccentric and a crank. After the shock of Koestler and his wife Cynthia's double suicide wore off, troubling questions began to be raised about his role in his wife's decision to end her life. (Unlike Koestler who was seventy-seven and dying of leukemia when he chose 'self-deliverance' in 1983, Cynthia was only fifty-five and in good health.) In the years that followed, Koestler's reputation was further damaged by revelations, in print, about his unruly private life, his heavy drinking, his temper tantrums,

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and his appalling treatment of women. All this contributed to a turning away from the man and his works. Koestler published more than thirty books, but except for his masterpiece, *Darkness at Noon,* which has been continuously in print since its publication in 1940, few of his books are available and read. Michael Scammell notes that

> the centenary of Koestler's birth in 2005 was virtually ignored in Britain and the United States. The few articles that appeared in the press were short and apologetic, and two small conferences held to discuss his work took place not in Britain, the United States, France, or Germany where his influence and fame had been at their greatest, but in tiny Hungary...

The unavoidable question: "Why read Koestler now?" is raised by Scammell himself early in his book. We might add another question: Why publish a monumental, close to 700-page biography of Koestler now? Scammell's answers are many and they are compelling enough to reawaken interest in both Koestler and his oeuvre.

The fluctuations in Koestler's fame and reputation are part of a larger 'Koestler problem,' the nub of which is that he eludes classification geographically, culturally and linguistically. "Never fully Hungarian," writes Scammell,

> not quite Austrian or German, a Jew who turned away from Judaism, incapable of being French, definitely not an Englishman, and unwilling to accommodate himself even to the melting pot of multicultural America, he wandered the earth like a modern Quixote in search of a spiritual homeland.[1]

Actually, after 1940, England did become Koestler's home and English replaced German as his literary language. Toward the end of his life he fancied himself, and began to dress and behave as a British gentleman, though much to his regret and frequent annoyance, he retained his heavy, Hungarian-influenced German accent in English to the end. For this reason alone he remained an outsider in England, too. Scammell quotes the critic George Steiner, another anglicized Central European, who enumerates further reasons. A "quintessential European universalist, a polyglot, and a writer who literally breathed ideas" could not possibly fit into postwar British society.

1 ■ Anne Applebaum, writing about Michael Scammell's book in *The New York Review of Books,* is also of the opinion that Koestler "as a Hungarian Jew and native German speaker who wrote in English... isn't a natural part of any canon. There is an Orwell society at Eton, but I doubt very much that there is a Koestler society at any school in Budapest." (*The New York Review of Books,* February 11, 2010, p. 11.) In a subsequent issue, a letter to the editor reminds readers that while there may or may not be a Koestler Society in Budapest, a new statue of Arthur Koestler was dedicated in a public park in the city's 6th district, where the Köstler family lived and where Arthur attended school. There is an accompanying photograph of the statue taken after its unveiling on October 21, 2009.

It wouldn't be difficult to add more items to the list of reasons why Arthur Koestler evokes mixed feelings, why he was always regarded with a degree of wariness. Chief among them would have to be the belief that his knack for being in the thick of things is somehow too amazing to be genuine. His life was too multifarious, too crowded and at the same time too complete and shapely, a perfect intellectual and spiritual journey, a breathtaking tale of adventure full of cliffhangers and abrupt reversals. Even the many 'binaries' and other symmetries of his mental processes seem too neat.

Shortly after he enrolled in Vienna's Technische Hochschule in the early nineteen-twenties, Koestler joined a Jewish fraternity with Zionist leanings and a fighting spirit, the only Jewish *Burschenschaft* to endorse duelling. Though young in years and short of stature, he became a skilled and courageous swordsman, and in short order was also sold on Jewish pride. Nevertheless, he was puzzled when he learned that some of his fraternity brothers remained observant Jews. Several years later, when he was already living in Palestine as an avowed Zionist, he came to the conclusion that the two things wrong with the new settlement were the Jewish religion and the Hebrew language. (Even when he returned to Palestine in 1948 on the eve of the establishment of the Jewish State, he tried to persuade influential Israelis to at least Latinize the Hebrew alphabet.) When Koestler fell out of love with Jewish nationalism, its place in his heart was taken over by Communist internationalism. He became and remained for years a dedicated and ardent party member. But by the end of the thirties, after his experiences in the Soviet Union and Spain, and after learning the truth about Stalin's show trials, he turned his back on communism, too. This time he gave voice to his disenchantment in a shattering novel, *Darkness at Noon.* Contrary to the charge, levelled against him in the "socialist camp" for decades, that he was an unprincipled, opportunistic renegade, Koestler remained a man of the left to the end of his life—despite the fact that in the late forties and early fifties he did become in his own way a cold warrior. He didn't find it all that shocking, for instance, that the CIA infiltrated and financed liberal organizations and publications in England and America. He knew well that the Soviets were spending incomparably more on propaganda. But he had no use for vulgar red-baiting; Senator McCarthy's witch hunts turned his stomach. Past fifty, he claimed he was through with politics, yet he was still capable of change and espousing new beliefs and causes. He became a passionate and active opponent of capital punishment and an equally passionate advocate of euthanasia. He sought out the gurus of the nineteen-sixties drug culture. Without repudiating his profoundly rationalist bent, he became intensely interested in forms of ESP and telepathy. His "oceanic feelings" verged on mysticism, a nameless religion.

All this was a bit much even for those who admired Koestler at certain points in his career. They couldn't help seeing him as a restless, driven man searching in vain for ultimate answers. Others, judging him more harshly, saw him as an overcompensating show-off and egomaniac who just had to be where the action was. Yet Michael Scammell reminds us that Koestler

> was a Zionist in Palestine when it was extremely unfashionable to be a Zionist, and an anti-Zionist when Zionism was in its prime. He was a Communist before communism became à la mode for western progressives, and an anticommunist at the flood tide of communist popularity during World War II.

It can be argued, of course, that anyone wanting to call attention to himself will just as easily embrace unpopular causes and ideas to show that he dares to swim against the tide and flaunt his contrariety. And Koestler was nothing if not a contrarian. But Scammell also points out the continuities in Koestler's life and works. Themes and attitudes from his early writings often reappear in slightly different form in his later books. *The Thirteenth Tribe,* for example, which was the last of his books to make a splash and stir controversy, was seen by some critics as Koestler's ultimate rejection of his Jewishness. The book is based on the unprovable hypothesis that most of the Jews of Eastern Europe are descendants of the Khazars, a Turkic people from the Caucasus, whose royal house did indeed convert to Judaism in the 8th or 9th century. There is clearly a connection between Koestler's theorizing in *The Thirteenth Tribe* and the erstwhile Zionist's view that the modern Jewish state should relieve itself of its ancient religion and ancient language. In both instances the attempt was to demystify the Jewish mystique and prove that anybody could be a Jew. Koestler fought against anti-Semitism all his life, and as a radical assimilationist he was convinced that the Chosen People, as myth, was as useless as it was dangerous.

Not everyone thought that the matter was this simple. Responding to *The Thirteenth Tribe,* a well-known American reviewer opined: Koestler was

> of course free to go his own way, but not because his grandfathers roamed the steppes. He is no Khazar. The evidence of his Jewishness rests not in the ratio of his blood cells, nor in his Hungarian birth, but in the much less controvertible fact that only a Jew would have taken so much trouble to come up with an alibi for his own self-effacement.

Another critic put it this way: Koestler was "a Jew to his finger-tips, not only in physical appearance, but in his whole habit of thought." In fact, he was in the "great tradition of Enlightenment Jews from Solomon to Maimon and Heine and Freud." Besides, if assimilation were ever a total success, "where should we get another Koestler?"

It bears repeating that Michael Scammell has meticulously researched every phase of Koestler's life, including his childhood and early schooling in Budapest. Koestler's Hungarianness was an important, though not central,

part of his life. He did think of himself primarily as a Hungarian, as did others. Not infrequently, his excitability, his irascibility, his melancholy and disarming charm were attributed to his Hungarian character. In the early chapters of his book, Scammell regales us with facts about Koestler's schooldays, which as far as I can tell were not known before. One fascinating tidbit is that in 1918, in the main Reáliskola of Budapest's 6th district, the school he attended, Hungarian literature was taught for a time by Dezső Szabó, and in all probability Koestler was one of his pupils. A major figure of early twentieth-century Hungarian literature, Szabó welcomed the democratic revolution led by Mihály Károlyi and even the Communist revolution that followed, but later reverted to being a right-wing Hungarian nationalist.

Then there is Koestler's attachment to Hungarian words. It is fairly well known that his Hungarian, because he didn't use it regularly for many years, became somewhat rusty and he wasn't always comfortable with it. He stopped writing in Hungarian much earlier. But certain Hungarian words remained dear to him for sentimental or intellectual reasons. One such word was *tudós*—Scammell mentions it several times and Koestler himself expounds on it in the first volume of his autobiography, *Arrow in the Blue*:

> The Hungarian language has a curious word for scholars: the word *tudós,* whose nearest equivalent is the French *savant*—the 'knowing one'. The English 'scholar' and the German *Gelehrter* merely convey academic erudition. The mysterious sound of the word *tudós* evoked in my mind, hungry for the answer to the great enigma, the idea that it designated a kind of all-knowing person—a medicine man or shaman. This belief, at first naïve and overt, lingered on unconsciously in my mind long after puberty and adolescence.

When Scammell began working on his biography in the late nineteen-eighties, he travelled to Hungary and interviewed relatives of Koestler still living in Budapest, as well as literary people like István Vas and Imre Cserépfalvi, who remembered him from the early thirties when Koestler spent several months in Budapest. Scammell writes that Vas, a "rising poet" then, "resented Koestler's patronizing tone and 'Jewish arrogance,' but noted how [Andor] Németh and Déry deferred to him". Of all his Hungarian literary friends and acquaintances, Koestler felt closest to Andor Németh. They first met in Vienna in the early twenties, when Koestler was an engineering student with literary aspirations and Németh, ten years his senior, already an accomplished writer and editor, who took the young boy seriously. Different in temperament and work habits, they managed to collaborate on several literary projects. And despite the fact that their thirty-year friendship ended on a sour note after World War Two, Koestler in his autobiography writes about Németh with great tenderness and affection. In his own memoirs, written during the last years of his life in Budapest, Németh, who died in 1953, is more guarded. Like Vas, he comments on Koestler's high-handed,

arrogant ways, and while he keeps referring to him as "my friend Koestler," he notes that his friend "irritated" him "to no end". There were good reasons why somebody writing in Communist Hungary in the stultifying early nineteen-fifties should not want to say good things about Arthur Koestler. Németh was in poor health at the time; he had lost his job as editor of the most important literary journal of the period, and it was clear to him that he was no longer deemed trustworthy by the regime—he was too 'international,' had spent too much time abroad. István Vas was also a cautious man, though in 1989 speaking openly to the biographer of a controversial Hungarian émigré was practically risk-free. But maybe we are dealing here with what George Mikes, the British-Hungarian humourist and a good friend of Koestler, called the 'so what?' syndrome. So what if this or that Hungarian writer became world famous? We are not overly impressed. Hungarian intellectuals are especially prone to downplaying their compatriots' successes abroad, especially if they really made it big.

Arthur Koestler, naturalized Englishman, wasn't quick to lionize fellow writers either, whether or not they were Hungarian. Tibor Déry, he thought, was "a bad writer, but a decent chap", which was enough for him to campaign for Déry's release after the Hungarian writer was imprisoned for his role in the 1956 Revolution. When Koestler heard that Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of Britain's Labour Party then, was about to travel to Moscow, he somehow obtained the party leader's private number and called him up, with two Hungarian friends listening in on an extension. When told by a secretary that Mr Gaitskell was already asleep, Koestler asked that he be woken up: it was a matter of life and death. Gaitskell did come to the phone and Koestler informed him that Déry, a great writer, was ill in prison, and asked that he intervene with Khrushchev. Gaitskell promised he would, and Déry was released—eventually.

Michael Scammell's book offers proof after proof that Koestler was a famously difficult man, and also extraordinary in his daring and iron determination to go his own way. I will focus on just one segment of his personal life, his relationship with his mother, to illustrate the extremeness of his reactions and his sovereign disregard for conventional behaviour.

Koestler's dislike of his mother bordered on the pathological, and no amount of Freudian insight can satisfactorily account for this aversion. Adele Jeiteles was a fashionable and sophisticated Viennese lady of a distinguished family, whose move to Budapest and marriage to Henrik Köstler, a successful businessman, was something of a come-down for her. However, at twenty-nine, Adele realized she was getting dangerously close to spinsterhood, so she consented to marry the ambitious and resourceful Köstler. The wedding took place in January of 1900, and the couple moved into a brand new apartment building in Budapest's up-and-coming Theresa Town. Five years later, after a long and difficult labour, little Arthur arrived. Like many affluent middle-class people at the time, the

Köstlers travelled and socialized a great deal, and Arthur as a child was often left with nannies, maids or relatives. This was not that unusual, but the adult Koestler never forgave his mother for her neglect and her unreliable and conditional love. (When she was angry with her little boy, Adele would bring up how much pain and suffering his birth had caused her and repeat her vow not to have another child.) To his father, a risk-taker and adventurer, who was wiped out financially several times during his business career, he was able to show much more understanding and affection. For someone who never really learned Hungarian and wasn't in her element in Budapest, Adele Köstler spent a significant part of her life in that city, including her worst years. The Köstlers moved to Vienna in 1919 when Arthur was fourteen, but after one of Henrik's business failures, husband and wife moved back to the Hungarian capital. Henrik died in 1940 and Adele felt alone and abandoned. Her son, a resident of Britain by now but not yet a British subject, was unable to have her brought out to England. He was guilt-ridden about this, and also dreaded the next reunion. Frail but tenacious, Adele managed to live through the war years. After it was all over, Koestler took steps to secure an exit visa for her, but in the meantime she remained in Budapest. Scammell relates that in early 1946 one of Koestler's Hungarian friends in London, Pál Ignotus, went to Budapest to deliver some lectures. Koestler asked him to take a can of sardines and some chocolate to his mother. Ignotus promised to call on her, but after his first lecture, to everyone's amazement, "an elderly lady in black stood up, waved her arms and called out in German, *'Ich bin die Mutter von Koestler! Sie müssen mit mir sprechen!'* (I am Koestler's mother! You have to speak to me!)" Ignotus later learned that Adele had become famous in Budapest for making the rounds in newspaper and government offices, and showing up even at Soviet Military Headquarters, to announce that she was the mother of a famous Hungarian author and should be allowed to go to Britain. Though ready to admit that she may not have been the world's most devoted mother, Adele felt she deserved better from her son. She was heartbroken and complained about his lack of attentiveness, his strange moods, but from the time Koestler's name became known, like a typical Jewish mother, she bragged endlessly about her son the celebrated writer. Her postwar letters from Budapest are full of longing and frustration that she was still separated from her darling Dundi (this nickname, meaning Chubby, actually appears on Koestler's birth certificate as one of his given names). Koestler, in a rare show of tenderness, wrote back: "Only a little more patience, dearest, and we shall be united again. Don't let yourself go; everything depends on one's own will. My books have been fairly successful here and in America, and I shall be able to give you all the comfort which you have so long and so bitterly missed." When Adele finally received her travel documents and was on her way, Koestler fell into a deep depression. He recalled with horror that he had told the immigration authorities that she could live with him. And to boot, he wrote the

same to her. But he realized now that such a living arrangement was "out of the question". He was going to take care of her, support her, but see her as little as possible.

Koestler kept his word. Adele lived out the rest of her life, almost another twenty-five years, in a home for 'Jewish Ladies' in London. To imploring letters addressed to "my beloved son," "my precious son," he replied with terse, typed notes in which anything personal was kept to a bare minimum. Yet every message, every visit rekindled his resentment. Koestler's second wife, Mamaine, recalled a particularly unpleasant visit with Adele during which she kept insisting that Arthur did not have an unhappy childhood. "K's face was worth seeing," Mamaine noted in her diary, "sparks of hatred flashed from his eyes, he grinned fiendishly." Toward the end of her life, she saw less and less of her son, though she kept sending letters and postcards, each one igniting fresh sparks of anger in him. Among friends Koestler referred to her as "my fucking mother".

Adele lived to the ripe old age of ninety-nine. Before leaving for her funeral, Koestler had to fortify himself with a few stiff drinks. It seems he had as hard a time facing her in death as he did in life. Earlier, the morning after she passed away, he staggered over to a friend's house dead drunk, and seething with rage, blamed his mother for her "last act of selfishness. She kept me there holding her hand till she died."[2]

It is difficult to defend, or even understand, such monumental, unyielding wrath, hurt, spite. Yet the obsessive nature of this relationship, with its ever-present undercurrent of regret and remorse, does shed light on his other connections, struggles and crusades. It would be too easy and glib to argue that Koestler's antagonism toward his mother served as the model for all his relationships with women and explains the cruelty with which he was capable of treating them. But the common thread in all his interactions is a defiance, a single-mindedness of purpose and a willingness to be totally outrageous in pursuit of a goal. Parent–child embroilments are special and make for high drama. Thanks to Michael Scammell's uncommon thoroughness, we get every baffling and sordid detail, all of which, by the way, are copiously documented.

Another drama, in a decidedly minor key, had to do with Arthur Koestler's natural, unacknowledged daughter, Cristina Graetz, whose mother, Janine, had a brief affair with him in the early nineteen-fifties. Koestler made no secret of the fact that he preferred dogs to kids, and because of his own miserable childhood

2 ■ There is some confusion in the book about the date of Adele Köstler's death. In a family tree prepared by the author, the date given is 1970; and in the Prologue we learn that she was ninety-nine years old when she died. But on page 476 we read that "Adele died at the ripe age of ninety" in the summer of 1960. I kind of wish that the later date is the correct one, for that would mean that Koestler survived her by only thirteen years. It would be poetic justice of sorts if he had to endure her existence for another ten years when he himself was sixty-five.

never wanted to have a child of his own. When one of his girlfriends or wives became pregnant, he made sure she had an abortion. But Janine refused, and her husband accepted Cristina as his own. Janine Graetz and Koestler remained friends, and she sent him reports about Cristina's progress in school, her musical accomplishments, her gift for languages, etc. She would have liked to present Cristina to him, especially when she was older and was told who her real father was. Koestler was tempted once or twice, but each time he decided against meeting her, let alone establishing any kind of relationship. The one and only contact was a letter he wrote to Cristina when she was seventeen years old:

> You are seventeen and I am sixty-seven. We are not one, but almost two generations apart—total strangers, and I have never believed in the significance of biological bonds, except for the intimacy which family life creates—but that is a consequence not of heredity but of environmental influences. If, as Janine says, you have read some of my books, you might have a flattering image of me, which I would not like to spoil. The suggested reunion would either be a Victorian melodrama or an exchange of banalities, both embarrassing and disappointing. As a writer I can vividly imagine the situation, and if you make an effort you will see it in the same way and get the giggles. Cowardice may have its occasional merits. You might think I am a monster, or you might agree with me and heave a sigh of relief. In both cases—*amitiés*.

It may seem almost unnatural to resist the urge to cast a glance at least at our unknown offspring; at the same time one cannot but be impressed with the tone and logic of such a letter, and the courage of its author's conviction.

It should be emphasized that Scammell presents ample proof of Koestler's generosity, chivalry and loyalty to relatives and friends, male and female. And for all his aggressiveness and arrogance, he could be very hard on himself. Two of his best-known bon mots are self-deprecating admissions of his insecurities. About his inferiority complex, he said famously: "Most people's feeling of inferiority is a hovel; mine is a cathedral." The other he came up with when a French scientist and essayist introduced one of his friends to him: "Ah, you've come to meet the author. It doesn't always work out, you know. It's a bit like having a wonderful meal of goose liver and then meeting the goose."

In one of his last interviews, Koestler was remarkably on target when quizzed on his virtues and vices as an author. *Virtues:* "a flair for making complex scientific ideas easy to understand... a taste for metaphors that expressed abstract concepts in visual terms, and a certain concision and fluency that critics derided as journalistic but was the result of hard work and many drafts." *Vices:* "repetitive, obscure and addicted to difficult subjects... As a novelist... preference for ideas over character."

If it is true, as some contend, that Arthur Koestler's greatest achievement was his own life, that he lived and died on his own terms, then Michael Scammell's biography, in its comprehensiveness, judiciousness and eloquence, is by far the greatest, most important book about Koestler. ❧

Sándor Striker

A Seventy-Year Friendship

Eva Zeisel and Arthur Koestler

"The characters in this book are fictitious. The historical circumstances which determined their actions are real. The life of the man N. S. Rubashov is a synthesis of the lives of a number of men who were victims of the so-called Moscow Trials. Several of them were personally known to the author. This book is dedicated to their memory." So writes Arthur Koestler at the start of his best-known book.

The potter and industrial designer whose married name was to be Eva Zeisel was amongst those to whom Arthur Koestler in 1940 dedicated *Darkness at Noon*. She had spent sixteen months in NKVD prisons, including the notorious Lubyanka in Moscow, mostly in solitary confinement, with no hope of ever getting out alive. To this day it is not clear whether her liberation was thanks to her mother's energetic fight and influence or to international pressure. Koestler blended what he learned from Eva with his own experience of prison in Spain, as well as with details of Bukharin's life, who had figured as the principal accused in a notorious show trial. Koestler used the figure of Rubashov in the novel to make clear the hideousness of the purges and show trials of the 1930s Soviet Union. A crucial element in *Darkness at Noon* can also be traced back to Eva's account: Rubashov, just like Bukharin, is persuaded in the interests of the party and the Soviet people to sacrifice himself, to confess to crimes he did not commit, then to be executed. In his memoirs, Koestler tells how at his meeting in London with Eva in 1938, following her release, she told him how the GPU tried to persuade her to plead guilty and admit her role in a conspiracy against Stalin. Charges against

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her included concealing swastikas in her designs for mass-produced tea cups and concealing two pistols under her bed so as to shoot Stalin at the next party congress.

Eva Striker and Artúr Köstler, as they were called then, were born in Budapest's sixth district in 1906 and 1905 respectively, just a few streets from each other, to assimilated Jewish middle-class families, who were on friendly terms; Artúr was sent by his parents to an experimental school for young children run by Eva's mother, Laura Polányi-Striker. The two children were in the same class, but only briefly, for—as Koestler mentions in his memoirs—his stunned parents removed him from the school after only a few months when he asked at home whether babies really were hatched from their mummies' tummies.

Eva's mother made a point of calling herself Dr Laura Polányi-Striker. Hers was an extraordinary family: her mother's salon was the meeting-point for the city's intelligentsia; her two—later world-famous—brothers were the chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi and the economic historian Karl Polanyi; Laura obtained her doctorate in aesthetics, English literature and history at the Budapest University for a dissertation on Maria Theresa's economic policy. She was an outspoken feminist throughout her active life. According to Eva Zeisel's own account, her mother suggested she look up Koestler in Paris where he was working as a journalist. The friendship continued down the generations. "I believe he [Koestler] considered us family," she wrote in a memoir. It was thanks to these family ties, that I, as her nephew, met Arthur Koestler on a few occasions in the late 1970s.

This gives us two principal characters: an almost archetypal man and an equally archetypal woman. Koestler was the archetypal man forever following new, promising ideas and theories in the hope of a better world, investigating more humane and just societies, and daring to traverse uncharted intellectual seas; a man who, wherever he went, was awaited by a woman who worshipped him. Eva Zeisel on her part was the archetypal heroine, throughout her life creating beautiful objects, pleasing to the eye, radiating love. At the age of 70, Koestler wrote to Eva: "Yes, the world is thinning out. However, I keep telling myself *'vieillir, c'est les autres'*. At any rate I have my work, and when I finish a book I get excited about the next one."[1]

Eva Zeisel's creative aspirations were expressed in a different sphere, in a different way. In her words: "When I see my bowls in a remote village in Western India or in the restaurant at Zurich Airport, I feel like a mother who has many well-behaved children all over the world."[2]

We learn much about this friendship from Koestler's well-known memoirs and Eva Zeisel's still unpublished recollections. In Paris in 1929 they lived

1 ■ Arthur Koestler's letter to Eva Zeisel, 18 October 1975.

2 ■ "Pár szó Washingtonból – Zeisel Éva" (A Few Words from Washington: Éva Zeisel), interview with Ákos Csernus, *Új Kelet*, 15 April 1988, p.10.

in adjacent rooms in a small *pension,* and the womanizing writer, who said of himself that he kept a 'harem', noted at their first encounter that his new neighbour was a stunningly beautiful girl with dark hair. Eva would always have breakfast ready for Koestler after the young journalist had posted two versions of the same story at daybreak, one to a bourgeois paper, the other to a social democrat. Sometimes she would accompany him to the post office, and on one occasion she demanded to know, with reference to Koestler's report on a tidal wave, how anyone had been able to establish that the waves had been seven metres high; he responded quite firmly that readers would believe anything he wrote, provided he put it in an interesting enough way. By this stage their relationship was surely more than mere friendship, but ended in defeat for the demanding Koestler: he was unable to have independent-minded Eva to himself.

After Paris their ways parted, but a few years later, in Berlin, they would meet regularly, for neither could live outside a social circle in which Eva was every bit as popular as Koestler. I never forget how, as a visitor one summer, when my aunt was over 80, I picked up the telephone when she was out of the house: the voice of the man at the other end of the line turned from one of optimism as he learned that he had Eva's number right to one of evident disappointment when told that she was not yet a widow.

The social milieu of the relationship of their youth was a mutual circle of friends in which influences, feelings, friendships and mutual attractions created a world that was much wider than a series of couplings, yet at the same time very tight-knit, although after the 1930s their old friends were mostly scattered all over the globe. Their conversations concerned the present and future, democracy, communism and changing the world. Eva Zeisel's recollection is that the Polányi uncles had already made them feel that all the world's problems were their personal responsibility. "Leó Szilárd and Arthur Koestler were the second generation, but they were never in doubt that if they did not interfere in the ways of the world, then theirs would be sins of omission". Eva, as she has admitted, had the impression that the Hungarians around her "were responsible for the whole world", or at least they lived, thought and acted as if they were.[3] This group of people naturally attracted those of like mind, such as the Communist physicist Alex Weissberg, Eva's first husband, and Hans Zeisel, her second husband. Later, in the United States, Hans Zeisel would, like Koestler, fight for the abolition of the death penalty.

This intellectual social life of friendly discussions, meetings and connections swept Arthur and Eva to journeys and adventures where they found themselves in bizarrely similar circumstances as if in parallel. Koestler, disillusioned with totalitarian communism, made his way to a Spain in the throes of civil war. And while Eva was the inmate of a Soviet prison, for three months Koestler found himself awaiting execution in one of Franco's prisons in Seville.

3 ■ Ibid.

When, after her release in 1938, Eva recounted her prison experiences to Koestler, thereby adding faithful details to *Darkness at Noon*, they also confessed to each other that they had sworn a private pledge to themselves they intended to keep if freed. Arthur Koestler vowed—as he would admit at the turning-point of their relationship—that he would play no part in world politics. Eva's vow is yet unknown to me.

Their differing values and their common ability to deal with trauma may explain how they behaved in the years that followed. Eva Zeisel continued her avoidance of political participation. "I have been an onlooker, a tourist through life and have never thought myself competent in political argument," she recalled. Once, with her usual self-mocking facial expression, she told me she was "the last remaining former non-Communist". She achieved world fame as an industrial designer and potter; her artefacts are in MOMA, and she lives in New York to this day. Most extraordinarily, she continues to work beyond the age of 100.

What is less known is how in the late 1970s and early 80s she devoted years to a historical investigation and to an accompanying book running to hundreds of pages, still unpublished, about a presumed show trial in 1740 of several dozen black people in New York and a preacher called John Ury, who supposedly organized them. Zeisel's claim was that Ury, whose possible Hungarian origins she also tried to explore, was still a galley slave when he resolved that if liberated he would do everything for his fellow prisoners still in captivity. If the story is correct, he really did do all he could for black people in New York, an act which entered American history as the 'Negro plot'. Ury was hanged together with the blacks; his fate and the way he was perhaps framed have still not attracted the attention of any American historians or publishers. The lengthy manuscript continues to lie in a bag in Eva Zeisel's house. It illustrates the similarly dedicated attitude of both mother and daughter that back in the '50s Laura Polányi wrote a study, based on historical sources, on the battles fought in Hungary by Captain John Smith[4]. This was a man who survived repeated imprisonment and close encounters with death, and whom earlier historians had branded a notorious liar. Polányi defended the honour of Smith, who founded Jamestown, Virginia, the first English settlement in the New World, and cleared his name for posterity.[5]

In his captive solitude and cloaked by the shroud of death, Arthur Koestler vowed never again to have anything to do with politics were he to be freed. If we consider *Darkness at Noon* simply and purely as a literary work, then for a

4 ■ See Nándor Dreisziger's article in *HQ* 184, pp. 128–131. [Editor's note]

5 ■ Henry Wharton, *The Life of John Smith, English Soldier,* translated from the Latin with an essay by Laura Polanyi Striker. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957.

while he kept his vow. However, Koestler, an anti-Communist to his death, delivered a political lecture in Carnegie Hall in March 1948, an act which drove Eva Zeisel to write to him.[6] Koestler's logic was very clear on several questions:

> History knows no perfect causes, no situation of white against black. Eastern totalitarianism is black; its victory would mean the end of our civilization. Western democracy is not white but grey... But ask the refugees who manage to escape, at the risk of their lives, from behind the iron curtain into our grey twilight world whether this choice is worth fighting for. They know. You don't... I feel the enormous burden which is falling on your shoulders. For there will either be a Pax Americana in the world, or there will be no pax.[7]

Eva Zeisel's view, however, was that in the age of nuclear weapons war could not be a tool even in a good cause, that it could not serve any cause. She warned Koestler that his words would reach not only their intended audience of "liberals leaving their left-wing past behind":

> Your audience was a homogeneous and typical one: clogged minded, with interchangeable, prefabricated thought patterns, negative conformists; not people who come to find an answer, but people who have already forgotten the questions to the answers they know so well.[8]

She added, in the name of the estimated twenty million who might die:

> A large part of your own audience believe that it is feasible and economical to liberate the Russian people by atomic warfare.[9]

Zeisel rejected Koestler's argument, and its logical distinction, maintaining that those present, those who would hear it and propagate it, were unable to, or unwilling to, make that distinction. She concludes on a personal note:

> I eliminated from this letter all personal remarks: how difficult it was for me to overcome my shyness in writing it. It is not my field to trace how public opinions are formed or not, my stake in this life is as big as that of those who are better informed, maybe even a bit bigger because of the Princess (my daughter), and the Doggie (my son).[10]

Perhaps the best summary of this meeting point in their two linked lives is Koestler's letter, that begins, in Hungarian, "My dear little Éva":

6 ■ Eva Zeisel's letter to Arthur Koestler, 29 March 1948.
7 ■ Arthur Koestler's lecture in Carnegie Hall, March 1948.
8 ■ Eva Zeisel's letter to Arthur Koestler, March 29, 1948.
9 ■ Ibid.
10 ■ Eva Zeisel's letter to Arthur Koestler, 29 March 1948.

Évikém,

I believe on the topical plane I can prove that your position is one of honourable error. On that other plane—I can't.

I too made vows in jail. The main one was never to meddle in politics again. I have broken it—for fear of sinning by omission. I may be terribly mistaken. But as long as I still believe in the lesser evil, I have to carry on.

Your letter was so clean and fresh to read that I again feel nearer to you than to anybody else, before or since.

Love
Arthur[11]

Now that Koestler's letters have reached Hungary in electronic form, it has become possible to research their previously unknown correspondence[12], and the documents can be compared with those from other sources. Their exchange of letters did tail off, however. As Koestler later wrote: "You have been on my writing list for the last five years—I hope I am on yours too"[13]. They each progressed along their own creative paths, showing only mild interest in the other's works. The 'muse' of the novel published in 1940 did not as much as look at *Darkness at Noon* until Koestler's death by his own hand in 1983, and when she finally did so, she was not impressed by it. The book was one of the key works of the Cold War, but Zeisel, having been through a Soviet prison, had kept herself out of politics all her life after that point, and—unlike Koestler—had not become an anti-Communist. Koestler, on his part, knew little of Eva's professional achievements. In a witty and ironic letter he told her of the trouble it had taken to persuade the customs authorities to accept the set of dishes Eva had sent as a Christmas present as not being of commercial value, so much so that they ended up arriving in time for Easter. He added: "only the soup tureen and one large platter were broken, but please do not send replacements, I would rather go without soup."

By this stage, the two lived in quite different worlds. To put it bluntly, Koestler applied himself to thinking up newer and newer startling and influential ideas, Zeisel to newer and newer startling and influential ceramics and household design items. Zeisel was exceptionally tight-lipped when it came to ideas and ideologies (even in her own field it was only at the age of 98 that she published her first theoretical work[14]) while it was precisely in the material world that Koestler felt himself on slippery ground as shown by his papers held by Edinburgh University, a surprising proportion of which is made up of

11 ■ Arthur Koestler's letter to Eva Zeisel, 31 March 1948.

12 ■ Eva's letters to Koestler can be found in the collection of Edinburgh University, while the electronic copies 'repatriated' to Hungary are kept by the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association.

13 ■ Arthur Koestler's letter to Eva Zeisel, from North Wales, sent on 29 December (no year stated), some time in the 1950s.

14 ■ Eva Zeisel, *On Design—The Magic Language of Things.* New York: Overlook Press, 2004.

carefully recorded yet insignificant accounts and calculations. I myself was able to see these two faces of the man when in 1977 my aunt Eva repeatedly wrote to Arthur[15] to ask him to help me cash a hundred-dollar cheque. The Hungarian consulate had taken away my passport that summer, I had no personal documents needed to cash a cheque and one was not able to creep out from behind the Iron Curtain with enough cash to feed oneself until the autumn. This problem turned into an almost insurmountable task for Koestler, for, as he ruminated to me, the transaction would affect his tax return. In contrast, he was not at all troubled by the task of dictating a letter of recommendation about me to his wife Cynthia to be given to London University, the statements in which would have been no easier to corroborate than those in the stories of seven-metre waves that he reported in his twenties.

Eva Zeisel's memoirs relating to Koestler are unpublished to this day, and her biography stands unfinished. The two cannot really be expected to meet again, at least not in their own understanding of things. In his farewell note, Koestler merely wrote of "timid hopes for a depersonalised after-life beyond the confines of space, time and matter and beyond the limits of our comprehension"[16], even though he had admitted to having been gripped by "the oceanic feeling" that Freud claimed he was unable to discover in himself. Koestler described his isolation as follows: "God seems to have left the receiver off the hook, and time is running out."[17]

On a visit to Eva Zeisel, in 2005, and in the process of making arrangements concerning her papers, I happened to be reading her teenage diary. She asked me to read out the part in which she told how, just before Christmas 1921, her younger brother, the eight-year-old Otto, was having an argument with their private tutor about the existence of God. He questioned whether the Lord could simultaneously watch every single naughty child in the world so as to punish them by not leaving them a present under the Christmas tree. To conclude the story, the fifteen-year-old gave a succinct summary of the debate in her diary, stating that she has long been sure there was no God. "You see, I knew even then," Eva Zeisel responded, smiling, a trace of impishness in her eyes, as, with only a year left before her hundredth birthday, she placed her hand on mine.[18] ❧

15 ■ These letters can be found in the Edinburgh collection.

16 ■ Arthur Koestler's note about his expected suicide in June 1982, in George Steiner, "Le Morte d'Arthur." *The New Yorker,* March 1983, p. 121.

17 ■ *The Ghost in the Machine.* London: Hutchinson, 1967, p. 339.

18 ■ Eva Zeisel will celebrate her 103rd birthday in November 2009.

Zsolt Láng

Poetics of Stories

László Darvasi, *Virágzabálók* (Petal Gobblers), Budapest, Magvető, 2009, pp. 680 • Vilmos Csaplár, *Hitler lánya* (Hitler's Daughter), Budapest: Kalligram, 2009, pp. 288 • László Garaczi, *Arc és hátraarc* (Face and About-Face), Budapest: Magvető, 2010, pp. 234

The past can be personalized in a variety of ways. Contemporary Hungarian literature is rich in this respect. The histories of Péter Esterházy and Péter Nádas are personal in different ways, and one has very different experiences reading works by authors such as László Márton, Imre Oravecz, or Szabolcs Benedek, the latter of whom, a younger representative of contemporary Hungarian writers, narrates the history of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic with sarcastic wit. Some authors recount personal memories, while others use sources. Some allude to history through the flavours and scents of their language, while others follow the examples of works of past centuries through various structural devices. From the works of Imre Kertész to Dezső Tandori, the relationship between history and life story finds expression in a divergent range of narrative forms.

László Darvasi's earlier novel *A könnymutatványosok legendája* (The Legend of the Tear Showmen) could be read as a short-story sequence, an anthology of stories bound together by a distinctive narrative form. *Petal Gobblers** also utilizes this device: the same story is told from five different points of view, and to make everything even more mysterious, we learn less about the story itself than we do about anything else. There are five characters telling the story, but they do not actually recount what happened. Beyond the relationship of the characters to one another, the stories are linked only by what remains untold. And what is the relationship between the characters? Love: love affairs entwine them, while they in the meantime amble and ramble about in space and time trying to recall what has taken place. The poetics of the narrative develops in the tension between story and storytelling.

Imre Szép is a botanist. He speaks the language of flowers, and "petal gobblers" is his metaphor. When he is arrested, he speaks about flowers, and his responses to the questions of the Habsburg interrogator are laden with symbolic references to

* ■ See pp. 17–24 for an excerpt.

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flowers. He is accused of inciting and participating in a murder. It does seem strange that a flower was placed in the victim's mouth. Imre Szép is arrested and incarcerated. But when does this actually take place? The novel covers a time span of approximately sixty years, the period when Hungary underwent momentous changes. It is the age of reform and revolution, the emergence of a new legal system accompanied by the evolution of a new bourgeois lifestyle, the disappearance of old traditions and the simultaneous birth of new ones, the promise and thrall of freedom, struggles for independence. In 1851, two years after the suppression of the Hungarian war of independence against the Habsburgs, Imre Szép holds lectures on flowers, first to the audience in the Casino (a kind of club frequented by the gentry), then to his interrogator, Captain Vogel. All this happens in an age of brutal retaliations intended to reinforce Habsburg rule. The Hungarian prime minister and the rebel generals had been executed two years earlier, inaugurating a rule of terror that was to last some twenty years, a period marked by persecutions, hangings and imprisonments. Yet Imre Szép speaks about flowers, and there is something metaphoric in the fact that in Hungarian 'world' *(világ)* and 'flower' *(virág)* differ by a single consonant. Imre Szép's name (which means Imre Lovely) is also a metaphor, and the character of his wife Klára Pelsőczy is rich in metaphoric associations. She is a flower-like creature, a wild mimosa, as the title of her chapter indicates. Three men believe themselves to have fathered Klára's child: her husband, his brother Péter Szép and their step-brother Ádám Pallagi. Péter Szép is an extremely strong and pragmatic man who considers the revolution a business enterprise. His love for Klára is sensual. The mysterious Gypsies who keep popping up believe that Péter Szép has killed Ádám Pallagi, who is not visible to everyone and seems barely to exist. He can foresee the fates of others, but never finds his own.

Essentially, each of the characters of the novel seems to unfold as a single metaphor in his or her own story plunging into time in order to seek their own destiny. They long to live their own lives, and as they grope in their searchings they collide with the lives of others. The only character who stands out in this web of translucencies, as if he were pulling the strings aware of the consequences of each decision and capable of planning the future, is Schütz, the old doctor, from this perspective a kind of alterego of the narrator. And there are also the Gypsies, who perceive and narrate the events differently, coupling them with unforeseeable and inexplicable miracles that complement Doctor Schütz's rationalism and calculation.

It is important to note that the lecture on flowers, which stands in the centre of the events and is of key importance, is never recounted to the reader. There are only allusions to it. We learn only of its consequences, and can draw conclusions concerning what actually took place on the basis of nothing other than the fragmentary accounts. Similarly, the Gypsies are never portrayed. They appear occasionally as a sort of supporting cast, or one could think of them as a chorus. The miracles alluded to by the grass musician Néró Koszta and Mama Root appear in a similar way. They are never witnessed, but figure rather only in the narratives of storytellers. The grass musician neither works nor invents miracles, he represents them through his story, and this also suggests that the world itself is entangled in the web of stories, in other words we can only make a habitat

for ourselves out of the world to the extent and in such a way as we narrate it.

As the five different versions of the story demonstrate there are as many realities as there are stories. Spectacular, fantastical and complex, but they explicitly do not create a poetic whole. All this suggests that reality is not something behind the story, but rather the story itself. Our lives themselves are not what they seem to be, rather they consist of the stories of our lives. We are not soundly secured canvases onto which roles are clearly painted, rather we are the roles themselves. So it was in the past, so it shall be in the future, this is what the novel seeks to prove.

> Most of our legends are past their time. Characters will be replaced and miracles will have to be designed, made and produced. They will be neatly walled off. Any phenomenon worthy of admiration and wonder will be expropriated and will become someone's private property, as if miracles had a physical dimension. And if in the past living things, the earth, sky and plant life served as a source of wonders, an age is coming when we will marvel at the inorganic. We will manufacture miracles, determine their likely date of expiration and mass-produce them.

In any case, an understanding of the relationship between reality and the narrative of reality may well turn into a heartening realization. If the world is the story of the world then the hand set in motion by imagination may well be able to change the world. There is even a chance that the gesture of guiding the hand will some day be a gesture of compassion.

> I am a coward, I am often afraid. I need miracles, Imre said softly, and then fell silent, pondering. And I think miracles need me, too.

Petal Gobblers is poetic reading. It can transform the hideous into the beautiful. I would place it on the shelf beside García Márquez and his followers.

As the title suggests, Vilmos Csaplár's previous novel, *János Kádár, the Righteous,* invokes the recent past as if it were a sort of fairy tale. Successive generations applied the adjective to Matthias Corvinus, the Hungarian Sun King, the founder of libraries, the generous patron, the martinet commander of the band of mercenaries known as the Black Army. How much truth is there to the legends of Matthias, the Righteous? Very little: as an absolute sovereign he curtailed the privileges of the nobility and strengthened his power by armed force and taxation but he did consolidate his kingdom. Did he ever mingle in disguise amongst the people in order to dispense justice? Obviously not. In fact, if we compare the stories about Matthias with those of *The Arabian Nights* we discover a number of similar leitmotifs. Similarly, Csaplár makes Kádár a mythical character in order to prompt his reader to adopt a more open mind and the era will slip in without stirring prejudices on any side. Then the dialogue between narrative and reader can begin at the level of the senses, and the world on which the 21st century now builds can take shape in neither guise nor disguise. Something essential is revealed about the childhood of the new century, primarily about the traumas obscured by nostalgia.

Hitler's Daughter tells stories of bloody horrors in a time spanning the Second World War and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Despite the title, it is not about Hitler, although he does appear, first in a Munich beer cellar, the Merry Pumpkin, where he seduces the

Hungarian kitchen maid Fanny Kucor and fathers her baby. At the time Fanny herself is unaware of the fact that she is Jewish, and even later she can hardly comprehend why she should be deported to Auschwitz with her growing daughter Jolán. This deportation reestablishes contact with Hitler, albeit only indirectly.

Hitler did not consider Jews human, just as in the subplot of the novel the peasants of the Hungarian Plains are not seen as human by the Hungarian gentry. The peasants are treated as animals. "I don't care why they die, just as one can't know where they come from, and how, but they are born, they procreate, and somehow they have to die," says a police investigator whose task is to solve mysterious murders. It is little more than a sham task, however, as the life of a peasant is of no value. In the chapter on the Kasztner train we learn the price of a Jewish life. Some Jews who were able to pay for their lives in gold were allowed to take this train from German-occupied Hungary to Switzerland. How much is a life worth, and why is one life worth more than another, or less?

The narrative is one of grave questions, unusual fates and intersecting destinies. Stevie Pipe, the murderer of peasants, was a real historical figure, reported on in contemporary newspapers and pardoned by Miklós Horthy. She was an outright murderer who together with her gang hanged peasants of the plains whose wives or children had hired her because life with their husbands (or fathers) had become unbearable. Though a woman, she took an active part in the hangings. Furthermore, the wives and children who hired her had to witness the murders, as this was the only way she was able to vent the anger she felt as a consequence of a childhood trauma that had turned her into a killer. But what does this have to do with Hitler's daughter? By saving him from his brutal father, Stevie Pipe rescues a boy, who later as an adult saves Fanny's daughter from the column of deportees being marched to the concentration camp. Rescuing is hardly the *mot juste* here since he only saves the daughter in order to confine her in a hovel and rape her. The threads of the plot are further intertwined, as the gendarme who saves Fanny will become a hero in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, a revolutionary taking up arms for Hungarian independence.

Despite the horrors recounted in the narrative, the reader is repelled neither by the novel nor by the author. This may be due to the light and easy manner of storytelling. There is no narrator, no mention is made of the difficulties of storytelling as so often happens in novels these days. The confidently structured sentences and the unbiased descriptions bring the invisible narrator close to the reader. There is humour here too, always popping up its head. Hitler is presented as a clumsy, burlesque character. He reminds one of Chaplin when he is preparing to lecture Fanny on the uses of vegetables:

> Somebody nudged her side. Hilda, the other kitchen maid, was calling her. Before interrupting her work, Fanny scanned the room with a stealthy glance and saw the chef crowding with the others in the door to the restaurant.
>
> Hitler had just brushed the hair from his forehead with a determined wave of his palm. He was standing by his chair at the table as if on a platform. During his speech he stood on his toes and then descended onto his soles. The rhythm of the movement was intended to make his sentences more effectual.

Fanny covered her mouth with her hand, the back of which had been touched by the man's cold lips just moments before. The orator's gestures were somewhat amateurish, and this made her giggle, although she had no idea how a professional orator would have spoken.

Despite the occasionally ghastly and sometimes agonizingly brutal and repulsive events, *Hitler's Daughter* is a clear, explicit and even cheerful book. I would put it on the bookshelf beside the works of Václav Havel and Milan Kundera.

Of the works in the autobiographical trilogy by László Garaczi bearing the title *Lemur, Who Are You?* and including *As if You Were Alive* (1995) and *The Splendid Bus Ride* (1998), the latest, *Face and About-Face,** is the saddest. Discourse here lacks the visionary, intricate sentences of the earlier novels, with their flashes of sensuality and fantastic, surreal images. The bare, simple sentences sputter somberly. *Face and About-Face* is the story of the army: a boy is called up for compulsory military service. He is supposed to do something no nineteen-year-old boy could do and remain of sound mind and body: that is the essence and undeclared goal of military service. It is an education. It breaks you in, and what it breaks you into means the order of the golden years of socialism, the mid 1970s. The narrator, nicknamed Bones, talks about himself sometimes in first person, sometimes in third person. (In earlier versions the protagonist was named L, thus strengthening the autobiographical tone.) Bones is capable of doing anything in order to be hospitalized and to nurse his hopes of discharge, even breaking his own arm.

Face and About-Face is not a nostalgic soldier's story. Neither is it an incitement against inhumanity. The world is horrible, brutal and inhuman as it is, as if inhumanity were trickling from the world's core, as if gravity itself were the most outrageous act of inhumanity, as if the physical laws of the world could not bear to have man grow up in it, as if matter itself rejected any kind of moral. Everyone uses and abuses everyone else without really wanting to, and everyone humiliates everyone else without being driven by any particularly brutal instinct or insidious goal. Yet we are well-versed in the tricks of the trade, as least as far as humiliation is concerned. How can people be humiliated? The military is the site of this ingenuity.

Even before beginning his military service the boy is familiar with similar settings. The school works just the same, it is a precursor of the army. Bones is like Camus's Meursault in many respects, except that he does not commit a murder, though it could have befallen him as well. It is little more than a matter of chance that he does not become a murderer, if not of another human being than of himself, so much does he long to flee. Not because of any longing for freedom. He is guided by more nebulous, concealed sentiments. Or if he does know his mind, he is incapable of putting his wishes into words. Although he collects words and records strange and unknown expressions in folders, he remains mute. He collects words because utterance, naming and eventually writing may relieve this paralysis, as if the horror uttered might lose its true force by having been voiced. The greatest terror is the invisible one, the potential horror lurking in the darkness.

* ■ See pp. 28–37 for an excerpt.

The other possible route is that of hallucinating stupefaction. There are many paths to inebriation, and the characters are very resourceful in this respect as well. The scene in which they are ordered to glue leaves back onto trees is memorable. Intoxicated by the smell of the adhesive, Bones imagines he is floating out of the garrison, and finally loses his virginity. He hovers above the trees, where anything can happen. He is not a virgin anymore, so he does not need to shoot himself, since he had sworn he would commit suicide if he were still a virgin at age twenty, because in his view virginity is a sign that someone is simply not made for this world.

> He builds splendid lookouts and hanging gardens, leafing himself up until he can hardly extricate himself from the leafy chamber he himself has constructed. He papers the trunk with leaves of various colours and shapes. After the third rest break he is in a state of euphoria, a fairy-tale empire unfolds before him. He forgets his defeat on the firing range, the hairy body, the nightmares. Yes, when he had been ordered to this wonderful barrack it had been the happiest day of his life. Creative energies arise within him, he can hardly wait to go to the next tree.

And what of the girls, who are not drafted? What is love like? It is mute. Words are unreliable. Words are under surveillance. A police state is a police state, even if it claims to be humane. What is the most effective means of control? Expropriation. And what is the method of expropriation? If all words bear the same meaning, they are meaningless. If stupidity is said to be sensible, then sensible talk ceases to exist. This is the age of stupidity, though it cannot be given this name, not simply because of the fear of punishment, but because there are no longer any words on which one can rely. The only thing to do is curse, because profanity is not intended to be sensible anyway.

The great nothing has to be achieved. Irony is perhaps the only chance. "Hikomat" is the term used to designate patients who have been hospitalized. It is an allusion to Trabant Hykomat, a vehicle for the physically challenged. But even the Trabant is ridiculous; no one ever considered it a real car. Requirements cannot be met, so they are never checked, and if they ever are, punishment is not meant to set things right, but rather to serve some other goal. Gluing leaves back to the branches from which they have been shaken is idiotic, but the aim is not to bring the leaves back to life. It hardly matters what happens to life.

It's autumn, the leaves are falling, but shaking them off the trees so that the company assigned the task of clearing them up can finish its evening work once and for all is a transgression that deserves court marshalling, since—let's say—by removing the leaves they destroyed camouflage concealing a military objective, and that is punishable by incarceration. Naturally, the humanitarian interpreters of statute will be forbearing and disregard the law if the leaves are returned to the boughs from whence they came. It hardly matters how, they can be stitched, taped or glued. Nobody ever thinks ahead or seeks any logic behind the decisions, because this is not their task. The task is to survive. This is a form of survival completely different from that of good soldier Svejk. Svejk gets away safe and sound. I would never place Garaczi's "soldier's story" beside Svejk. It belongs rather beside Camus. ❧

János Végh

How European Is Hungary?

Ernő Marosi, ed., *On the Stage of Europe*. Budapest: Balassi, 2009, 363 pp. (Also in Hungarian and German)

László Csontos, who found refuge in England after the 1956 Revolution, left the Hungarian Academy of Sciences a substantial sum of money in his will, "to spread awareness of Hungary's millennial contribution to the idea of the European Community." In discussions about the nature of this contribution, Hungarians show themselves proud of it while doubting, however, whether the rest of Europe agrees. Small nations do not particularly interest large countries and other small nations take their cue from the major centres. At best close neighbours will take notice. The isolation of the language adds to the problem. Hungary's written heritage is incomprehensible even to many historians of the region and for the great majority of educated Europeans it might as well not exist. That is a fact of life which Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004 did little to change. If anything, it has made the sense of isolation keener. Scepticism, indeed aversion, is palpable on the part of the older member states—never officially, of course, but certainly by opinion makers.

The volume under review clearly helps to make Hungary better known to the wider world by presenting so far less known aspects of its history. The editors chose not to put together a volume of source material such as a compilation of laws, official documents, private letters and extracts from the press and literary works. Instead they offer a variety of images, trusting that works of art can be interpreted as historical sources defined by their visuality. The authors of the explanatory texts—historians and art historians—had no wish to produce what would essentially have been a simple illustrated history book. A well-reasoned selection turned the book into an interesting experiment.

Placed at the front end of the book as a separate chapter, thus slightly upsetting the chronological order, is the crown of the kings of Hungary—the "Holy Crown". Tradition links it to the founder of the

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kingdom, Saint Stephen the King (†1038), who is said to have received it from Pope Sylvester II, but meticulous examination has established that while some of it originates in the 11th century, other parts were made in the late 12th century. One camp looks on the Crown as a work of art of inestimable value. Their opponents, with no less justification, see the Crown, albeit the work of goldsmiths, as an actor 'on the stage of Europe' in its own right. They see it as the embodiment of the Christian ideal of the Hungarian state. In keeping with this notion, a few years ago the government of the day had it transferred from the National Museum to Parliament.

The rough plan of the ensuing discussion divides the country's history into five chapters, taking the reader from the entry of the Magyars into the land now called Hungary (from 896) to the present day (the last object is dated 2007). At the beginning of each chapter comes an essay-length historical discussion followed by a selection of plates and commentaries. The duration of the periods under discussion gets shorter as we go on (Chapter 1 covers more than half a millennium, Chapter 5 less than a century), but there are roughly the same number of pictures for each chapter. This is because people are more interested in events that they have witnessed, or which they are familiar with, than in stories told by their elders. The commentaries that go with each picture are provided with brief bibliographies, suggesting further reading, though sadly there are relatively few books or articles mentioned in languages other than Hungarian. The introductory essays to the chapters and the glosses on the illustrative images were all written by distinguished historians and art historians, who are outstanding not just because of their expertise in the relevant area but also because of their flair with the written word.

The authors state with satisfaction that Hungary's EU accession is nothing less than an international acknowledgement of Hungary's return to the ranks of states which it first entered around one thousand years ago by adopting Christianity. The texts frequently emphasize Hungary's links to Europe and the sojourns of various major figures, for instance the most famous botanist of the 16th century, the French-born but largely Dutch-domiciled Charles de l'Écluse (1526–1609). He published under the name Carolus Clusius and his *Rariorum stirpium per Pannonias observatorum Historiae* (1583) was the first book on Austrian and Hungarian alpine flora. Then again there were artists like László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) who made a name for themselves outside Hungary, and still others like Lajos Vajda (1908–41) who strove to make their work a bridge between East and West.

There are also instances where a past event and its consequences today are discussed together, like mirror images:

> Although in 1790, following the resistance of the nobility, Joseph II withdrew a number of decrees he had issued as attempts at modernization, a great number of them were later reintroduced as necessary measures. Some of the regulations in question, however, concern matters like the regional division of the country with which Hungary's politicians are struggling to this day. Although now it is at EU urging, it is still related to alignment to the European centre.

There is no lack of objects or documents which are intended to remind readers what Hungary did to further European security or the concept of Europe. One of the notable instances took place around the end of the 16th century when the kingdom of Hungary became a

staunch bulwark of the Christian faith, a *propugnaculum Christianitatis,* in the face of Ottoman military power. Equally there is also reference to the times when Hungary in turn required outside (one might say European) assistance, e.g. to finance the construction of a line of frontier fortresses, or the war of liberation against the Ottoman Turks. The book has been published in both English and German versions, but some passages are aimed pre-eminently at Hungarian readers to encourage clear thinking on sensitive topics such as "fostering in contemporaries false illusions of Hungary's attainment of 'great power' status, and raising in the eyes of posterity visions of Hungary being a 'great power'".

The illustrative material for Part 1 is a good example of clever selection. The first illustration is a sabretache, one of the few extant relics of the period before Hungary adopted Christianity, with a gilded cover plate of fabulously worked gold. Saint Stephen's period is represented by a richly embroidered cope that he commissioned. This is followed by pictures of the Porta Speciosa of the Saint Adalbert Cathedral illustrating the importance that Esztergom/Gran, functioning as a religious and secular seat, had during the 11th–13th centuries beyond the country's borders, most notably in Austria. A floor tile with the figure of a centaur from the palace there is evidence of the diffusion of the *Roman de Troy* and the *Chanson de Roland* as a result of which, for a century or so, the names Achilles, Priam, Roland and Oliver were accepted into the corpus of personal names, at the time still largely dominated by pagan imagery, to be later supplanted by names of Christian origin.

Royal seals, which serve as guaranteed tokens of royal authentication, are generally not accorded sufficient attention. This book is an exception. Mention is made of a Cross of Lorraine when discussing a royal seal evoking the Holy Cross, which still features in the Hungarian coat of arms and can be traced back to the Saint Stephen cult of the time. We learn about its special meaning from a letter sent by Béla IV to Pope Innocent. In this the king requests the help of Christendom after the Mongol ravages, arguing that Hungary is the protecting shield of Western Christianity. The Cross of Lorraine is the symbol of this. A mural of King Saint Ladislaus wrestling with a chieftain of the Cumans in Kakaslomnica (Vel'ká Lomnica, Slovakia) is related to the role he played in stopping westward incursions by another nomadic equestrian people originating in the steppe lands of eastern Europe. From a discussion of a diptych of King Andrew III, studded with precious and semi-precious gemstones and miniatures, emerges a picture of a royal court with connections to Venice and deeply embedded in the religious and political thinking of its times.

Two impressive miniatures are used to refer to a Hungary which in the 14th century was increasingly linked, through its art and its commercial contacts, with *trecento* Italy. One is the miniature which appears on the frontispiece of the *Illuminated Chronicle* and presents great lords clothed and armed in a variety of ways. King Louis I is sitting among his followers on an ornate throne as the embodiment of the just and wise king. On his right stand the western armoured knights, on his left those in oriental garments, as a token of a policy of reconciling East and West. (It is noteworthy how mediaeval Hungary was able

to switch links from one authoritative European cultural centre to another, for example from France to Italy at the dawn of the Renaissance.) The emblems and seals of chivalrous orders which follow illustrate the activity of Sigismund of Luxemburg (1368–1437)—King of Hungary (1387–1437), later Holy Roman Emperor (1411–37) and King of Bohemia (1419–37)—whose reign, carrying out reforms of a European scope, was aimed at a just European order. As a leading ruler of the Christian world, Sigismund, in 1416, received a plea from Charles VI following France's defeat at the battle of Agincourt the previous year. Sigismund then tried personally to broker a peace with Henry V of England to put an end to the already long-running Hundred Years' War (1338–1453). The flowering of the Late Gothic era is evoked by two magnificent panel paintings of the main altar of the old church at Szepeshely in former Hungary (Spišská Kapitula, Slovakia) which shows kings of Hungary and other European countries. The commentary refers to a collection of sermons of the time: in Europe all nations had devout Christian rulers who then were accorded a distinguished place in the cult of saints of their countries.

King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), keenly interested in Antiquity and scholarship, built up a library that was the envy of humanists the length and breadth of Europe. Plates in the volume show flyleaves from two of the several hundred still extant codices, many of which are embellished with lavish miniatures. The title page of the so called *Philostratus Codex* has the greatest wealth of decorative elements, in the *all'antica* style: medals, cameos, a firework of architectonic elements, mythological scenes and a triumphal procession. A portrait of Matthias can be seen among the cameo-like golden coins of Roman emperors in the frame on the left-hand sheet. The miniaturist placed the title in the form of a golden panel with carved roman-type letters. The reproduction from the *Ptolemaios Codex* is a map, the first known depiction of Hungary and its surroundings. Based on the system of Ptolemy, widespread at that time, it was drafted in line with the new methods of the age, with north at the top and latitude and longitude indicated.

Following Matthias's premature death without a legitimate heir, the Italian trend was broken, but the interest in Antiquity was undimmed; Augustinus Olomoucensis (that is, born in Olomouc, a city in Moravia), for instance, one of the members of an international band of humanists, the *Sodalitas Danubiana,* commissioned a golden bowl with inserted antique coins. By then, though, partly as a reflection of Hungary's geographical location, the Renaissance was mediated increasingly by German sources. The altar at Lőcse (Levoča, Slovakia) is essentially Renaissance in style, but the paintings and sculptural aspects are still medieval in inspiration while the parish priest who commissioned it was under the intellectual influence of an entirely different part of Europe: he asked for the portrait of Jean de Gerson, a distinguished French theologian, to be painted on its back. The last illustration in this chapter again tells of an Italian connection. The tomb slab in Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome is of a prelate from Hungary who held the office of Hungarian confessor there. The words of the epitaph can be traced back to Cicero and stress the justification for the Roman-style tomb raised over him as "Rome is home to all and always has been."

The selection in other chapters has been made on similar grounds, so that we see woodcuts, etchings, copperplate engravings, maps, book covers alongside paintings. Architecture is sparsely represented. What we have are views and maps of the ensemble of buildings and the palace at Eszterháza, its magnificence displaying many aspects of aristocratic life in the late-Baroque era. Over the last 150 years photographs appear, at first sporadically but then, from the start of the 20th century, ever more often. Illustrating the past 60 years there are as many photographs as all other genres combined (the supremacy of the photograph, pushing all other arts into the background, is itself a European phenomenon).

Most of the comments are historical, and there is no discussion of stylistic connections, or the early and late works of a particular artist or other art-historical questions. Although on leafing through the book one might hope for a concise history of Hungarian art, it is most definitely not that. The most frequently reproduced images are missing, and instead space is given, for example, to minor artists and works such as the one by Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473–1531), a German painter and printmaker. One of his woodcuts provides a marvellous idea of the clothes worn by a Hungarian nobleman in the early 16th century.

This is an illustrated history book with illustrations assembled along descriptive, sometimes just documentary, lines as is the case with the etching entitled "Bringing the Holy Crown of Hungary Home from Vienna to Buda." The event on 21 February 1790, represented somewhat naively on the etching, was a triumph which did give a major push to national consciousness. (The absolutist Habsburg ruler Joseph II ordered the royal insignia to be placed in the Treasury in Vienna in 1784.) The spectacle we see is interesting rather than beautiful, but in most of the pictures, the two aims coincide. The illustrations add value, and in particular the increasing number of photographs over the most recent decades. The survey is not without occasional gaps, but sometimes those absences in themselves are revealing. This can happen when a suitable work has not been found or when it was destroyed "in the course of the bloodstained centuries of our history."

In short, the book is a rich selection for anyone with an interest in Hungarian history, both for those who already have some knowledge and those just becoming acquainted with it. ❧

John Batki

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors

Miklós Vajda, *Anyakép amerikai keretben* (Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame). Budapest: Magvető, 2010, 208 pp.

Miklós Vajda's 'essay-memoir', *Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame*, is a deceptively modest masterwork. Modest, because it stays within the frame of its seemingly limited objective, while giving the reader so much more than the title and the genre promise. Reflected in the portrayed mother's eyes, as in a convex mirror within the depths of a Flemish Renaissance painting, the reader discerns a faithful miniature portrait of the author himself. In addition to painting a moving portrait of his mother, a *rara avis,* one of the last representatives of a vanishing species, Vajda also sketches, with deft strokes, significant outlines of his own *Vita,* while touching upon certain central issues of twentieth-century Hungarian identity. We are given intimate glimpses of the author's mother that sparkle as exquisite close-ups, details of an implied panorama that spans decades and continents, in a magic act of literary art joining the outer, objective world to the inner, subjective one.

The first third of this work has appeared in the pages of *The Hungarian Quarterly* (No. 191), in George Szirtes' fine translation, and one hopes the entire text of the memoir will soon become available in English. Miklós Vajda's vast experience as editor and literary translator combine to inform a narrative viewpoint that makes this memoir uniquely attractive for the Anglophone reading audience.

The fine edge of guilt that sharpens the focus of these recollections is surely the inheritance of every mother's son trying to create a just portrait of, and in the process, do justice to, a mother inevitably resented, rejected or rebelled against at various times. And how revealing, of the portraitist's own vanities and follies at various stages of youth and mid-life, the painstaking account of these guilt-provoking instants! It takes a searing honesty to look this hard and this close. The layers of guilt lie thick and varied: at one time (the late 1940's, Hungary's hardcore, early

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Stalinist years), Vajda was even "deeply and genuinely ashamed" of the aristocratic origins of his mother's side of the family.

Views of a mother cooking for her son. This comes with an unexpected, dislocative twist: she is cooking a steak in her kitchen of her New York apartment, cooking for her son who is visiting from Hungary for the first time, circa 1965. Back in December 1956, taking leave of each other at the train station in Budapest, it is not the 25-year-old son who is going abroad, escaping to the West as one of the 200,000 Hungarians of the post-revolutionary exodus, but rather the mother, a true victim of the Communist regime, who is departing to evade re-imprisonment on trumped-up charges. The reversed roles (adventurous mother, stay-at-home son) seem to endow the narrator with extrasensory insight in creating this portrait. Having been granted permission by the People's Republic for a three-month visit to the US with a grand total of five dollars in hard currency in his pocket, in New York he is dependent on his mother for spending money. Her generosity is poignantly underscored by Vajda's compassionate account of her humble emigrant's quarters in the city of New York (complete with a cumbersome makeshift TV-antenna), just as her constant attentions are reflected in the empathetic depiction of her progressive, dignified descent from being a grande dame of society in the 1930's.

Views of a mother eating. We are treated to a remarkable description (comparable to Krúdy's meticulous 'eating documentaries') of the mother's highly individual style of wielding knife and fork, adjusting

> the food on her plate with great topographic precision, shifting it here and there with careful, tiny, sweeping movements... She cuts and spears a small piece from the meat, loads the appropriate amount of garnish on the round back of the fork and so carries it to her mouth. This is a far from simple operation... since the caper seeds would drop from the fork were they not perfectly balanced there and flattened together a little, did not the speared piece of meat or potato block their escape route, and did she not lean progressively closer and lower over her plate with every bite... She divides the meat, the garnish and the salad so that everything disappears from the plate at precisely the same time, every piece of meat with its due portion of garnish and vice versa.

This masterful rendering in microscopic detail is followed by a revealing admission:

> In my first days at the university canteen I was laughed out of countenance as I was unmasked as a true-blooded bourgeois leftover from the old regime when, out of habit, I started employing my mother's technique.

The miniature expands into a panoramic view: from the mother's New York City apartment in 1965 we catch a glimpse of Budapest circa 1949–50, after the Communist takeover. The memoir abounds in such magical montages.

Every observation has its purpose; the detailed listing of the second-hand furnishings in the mother's New York apartment foreshadows and underscores one of the climactic moments of the memoir, the episode of the priceless Baroque tabernacle that concludes the first section. This family heirloom, the last

remnant of ancestral magnificence surviving from the mother's side of the family, is impetuously and somewhat foolhardily sacrificed by the author, then in his twenties, in order to purchase a coveted second-hand sailboat. The narrative leads up to the crucial moment of Vajda's confessing this sin, a decade after its commission, to his mother in her New York apartment where only tiny vestiges—a signet ring, a silver photograph frame, an ashtray—remain as relics of the treasured antiques formerly in the possession of her historically prominent family.

A visit with his mother to a US naval base unleashes a brilliant sequence of memories leading back to Vajda's childhood and adolescence. These snapshots of former selves (ardent preteen irredentist/militarist, Cistercian zealot, aspiring soccer goalie) dating from the author's youth, seen through the mellowing irony of a mother's eyes, are vivid and convincing in their objectivity, sourced as they are "on the constantly spinning hard disc of maternal memory".

The second part of the memoir contains a riveting account of mother and son during the excruciating war years of 1943–45. After a summer of inanely juvenile involvement with a chauvinistic, anti-Semitic youth movement, in the fall of 1943, Vajda, at age thirteen, learns from his mother that his father is a Jew who had converted to Roman Catholicism in his youth. A year later, after the extremist Arrow Cross Party seizes power, the narrator is suddenly in danger of his life, when he and his mother are abducted and find themselves prisoners at the Arrow Cross headquarters for a day and a half. The timely intervention of Vajda's "fairy godmother", the famous actress Gizi Bajor, accompanied by a member of the Swedish Legation, brings about their release. For the duration of the brutal siege of Budapest mother and son hide out in a series of apartments—crucial months during which the fourteen-year-old son sees his mother from closer up than ever before, and receives a lesson in maintaining human dignity in the face of uttermost privation. The three embraces bestowed on him by this otherwise undemonstrative mother during this time of mortal danger are unforgettable for the son, and serve as dramatic drumbeats at the heart of the story.

The concluding third part of the memoir is a marvellously sustained séance that 'completes the frame' by providing revealing details of the mother's life (and death) in America—starting with a cinematically composed, bizarre dream that is depicted in a treatment worthy of a Fellini: a glimpse of the mother as one of a myriad female Chinese soldiers exercising in geometric formation on an infinite field. For Vajda, the dream is emblematic:

> Today this dream says to me that I truly cannot contact her any more, for she no longer exists, having melted into the infinite universe, yet I can still be together with her, for in me she lives on, although our only possible connection is my describing her, taking her apart and putting her back together, interrogating her, confessing to her, understanding and exhibiting her, to the best of my ability.

As good as his word, Vajda does justice to each of these modalities in portraying his mother. Just as on his first visit to America he had confessed selling her priceless antique furniture, later, at age 46, on a subsequent visit at her new residence in a small town in Pennsylvania, he at last confesses, much to her dismay,

to having been a peeping Tom at age 16, when he had spied on the bedtime routines of a neighbour's three beautiful daughters. Motherly forgiveness is followed by filial understanding, when, in the course of a transatlantic telephone call occasioned by the mother's worsening health, he finds out that she has for many years been a member of the Christian Science Church, a fact she had until then managed to successfully conceal from her son. Upon Vajda's insistent interrogation, his mother ruefully confesses, then rejects, her long-time involvement with the sect. But time is running out, and on the occasion of Vajda's last visit to her, she is confined to a nursing home. Both mother and son know that this is the end of the road. The account of this heartrending visit, in the shadow of Nevermore, avoids the least hint of mawkish sentimentality by being true to character. Vajda allows his mother to add the finishing touches of his exacting portrait of her, by letting her relate episodes of her life, one of which, a meeting with Regent Miklós Horthy, led to his mitigation of forced labour requirements. Another reminiscence reaches far back into her youth, and touches upon her first love, as well as memories of her parents. With her gone, the self-image of a historic family will sink into her grave. Eight months after the final meeting, her ashes will be buried at the foot of an ash tree in a Pennsylvania garden.

As a sobering documentary coda, the volume ends with a facsimile record of the correspondence between the actress Gizi Bajor and Mátyás Rákosi as well as other apparatchiks of his Communist dictatorship. By showing the great actress making a desperate plea on behalf of Miklós Vajda's mother, who was arrested and imprisoned on false charges by the Communist regime in 1949, these letters offer first-hand insight into the workings of the system during the darkest years of the Stalinist era in Hungary. They provide a fitting 'objective correlative' to the subtle subjective lesson that pervades this outstanding work: remembrance, and the understanding that comes with it, is earned as the prize of the highest creative effort. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Belated Amends

Milán Füst: *A boldogtalanok* (The Unfortunates) • Sándor Weöres: *A kétfejű fenevad* (The Two-headed Beast)

It is something of a commonplace that drama has never been the dominant genre in Hungarian literature and that the Hungarian theatre has therefore always lagged a bit behind. The single exception proves the rule. Ferenc Molnár, whose plays were performed in theatres around the world during his lifetime, was celebrated in Budapest, the city of his birth, as a permanent author-in-residence at the Vígszínház, or 'Comedy Theatre', which alongside the National Theatre was the most important theatrical company in Hungary.

There is more than a hint of truth in the brief description above, but it is not the whole truth. There were some Hungarian writers and poets who also wrote plays, and their dramas are no less significant than Molnár's works for the stage, yet they never achieved the same success. There are several reasons for this, one of which is the figure of Molnár himself, who from his first sweeping success in 1907 with *Az ördög* (translated as *The Devil* in 1908) was in a position to dictate both style and theatrical ideals with his elegant salon pieces. Indeed his influence was such that along with his epigones he came to assert hegemony over the theatre. One can hardly fault him for this. He was too talented, and he was able to take possession of the world of the theatre. The theatres of the day, however, cannot be excused entirely for having exercised a dictatorship over taste. The light-hearted Molnár weighed heavily on theatre life. Theatre managers eager to garner success with similarly facile plays rejected works for the stage that offered more complex and less crowd-pleasing portrayals of social conflicts. There were significant writers of whom the theatre took not a moment's notice, and there were others who were effectively silenced as dramatists. Still others were 'merely' deformed by the whims of the theatre, tamed into writing to meet commercial needs, and not just for a few years, but in many cases for decades.

Today two authors of the recent past have risen to new-found prominence on the programmes of Hungarian theatres, authors whose works have been rehabilitated for the stage as theatrical companies have ventured from time to time to rediscover them from a contemporary perspective (unlike Molnár, who needs neither

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rehabilitation nor rediscovery: he has stayed as he was, and the new productions of his plays are at their best when they differ little from their older and traditional ones).

Milán Füst (1888–1967) created a magnificent oeuvre as a poet, aesthete, novelist and playwright. His 1954 translation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is definitive, and his novel *The Story of My Wife* (1942, English translation by Ivan Sanders, 1989) reportedly almost won him a Nobel Prize for Literature. His 1931 play *Negyedik Henrik* (Henry IV; revised 1940) was not performed in Germany only because of the poverty of the translation. Still, his works for the stage generally met with little or no interest in Hungary.

The Unfortunates, written in 1914, had to wait half a century for its premiere. It made it as far as the desk of the director of the National Theatre, who recognized its merits but considered it so depressing that he backed down fearing that it would weary the average viewer. The case of Füst was typical of general attitudes in the theatre at the time, which had limited tolerance for the portrayal of everyday social realities on the stage, and this was true not only of the commercial theatre, but also of the National Theatre. These audiences most certainly would have turned up their noses at *The Unfortunates,* based on a brief newspaper report about the suicide of a young seamstress. She and an older female friend had been the mistresses of a printer. The two women decide to kill him, but the girl turns the pistol against herself at the last moment.

It is hard to imagine how a twenty-five-year-old writer was able to elevate this wretched melodrama about an eternal triangle from the banality of a shudder-inducing slice of life and transform it into a portrait of far wider validity concerning psychological traumas, crippled emotions and miscarried lives. Yet in the minimalist simplicity of this bleak story, reduced to its bare essentials, an existential drama and tentative poetry lie hidden. The stifling atmosphere of self-tormenting emotions in human relationships limns depths that were only to become mainstream half a century later with the likes of the British kitchen-sink plays of the fifties and early sixties. Seen from the outside, the male protagonist strikes one as a bungling Don Juan; in truth he is fleeing himself. He does not wish to encounter his former self, who had once deserved a better fate. The two women, each in her own way, attempt to thwart his flight, and they fail to realize that they are intensifying his smouldering self-loathing. The growing tension leads slowly but surely to the death of the innocent and vulnerable victim.

Füst lived to see the premiere of *The Unfortunates,* though he was nearing his eightieth birthday at the time. Since then the masterpiece has been periodically revived for the stage (see e.g. my review in *HQ* 181). It is currently being performed in the Radnóti Theatre in Budapest and in Zalaegerszeg. The production in Zalaegerszeg abandons naturalistic settings and tediously detailed acting, but it does not remove the work from the atmosphere of its own day, employing stylization and at times venturing into the realm of surreal poetic burlesque. The production in Budapest transposes the plot to the present day, placing emphasis on the raw and brutal elements. The thrust is conveyed less by portrayals of internal changes and more by external events. The radical difference between the two approaches is itself proof that Füst's play has not become obsolete.

Like Füst, Sándor Weöres (1913–89), one of the finest Hungarian poets, was discovered late as a dramatist, despite the

fact that he had taken an interest in the stage as a boy, as evidenced by the 'opera fragment' written in all likelihood when he was fifteen or sixteen and discovered only posthumously. Tucked away among the papers of his estate were also many subsequent fragments that no doubt remained unfinished due to the lack of interest, later coupled with ideological control. Seven of his plays were published in his lifetime, the earliest of which dated from 1938, but theatres were never particularly keen to keep them on stage. For a long time only his fairy-tale plays were performed, and only towards the end of the sixties was the monumental verse play entitled *Octopus avagy Szent György és a sárkány* (Octopus, or Saint George and the Dragon, 1965) professionally staged.

As a poet Weöres revelled in teasing out playful morsels of stylistic and poetic bravura. His work as a playwright is characterized by a similarly dazzling formal variety, displaying a readiness to experiment in many different genres, though his output for stage can basically be categorized under two headings. The historical and mythological perspectives offered by his philosophical pieces alternate with fairytale plays, which tap into folk humour and customs, romantic flights of a lively fantasy. In many cases, these elements are intertwined, and it is precisely this intertwining that gives Weöres' art its unique flavour. Of the above-mentioned hallmarks, his choice of historical-mythological subjects and the philosophical handling of these subjects are simply foreign to the established traditions of Hungarian theatre. This was not the only reason why he was unable to develop closer relations with the theatre, however, and abandoned writing for the stage early in his career. His decision was probably due more to the cavils of cultural policy surrounding any performance or publication of the plays. Permission was given for Act 1 of *The Two-headed Beast* (1968) to be published in a provincial magazine, but not for any sequel, and permission to produce it on stage was withheld until the eighties. It turned out to be the last play Weöres wrote.

Today it is not difficult to understand why *The Two-headed Beast* was banned. (Hungary officially had no censorship, bans were not in writing, but they were known to be based on the personal decision of the Party's chief ideologue, transmitted verbally. It was advisable to accept the verdict to avoid punitive sanctions, such as losing your job, a punishment by no means unheard of.) The root cause was undoubtedly the irreverent, ironic and satirical stance that Weöres adopted towards history, which was completely at odds with Marxist philosophy. *The Two-headed Beast* amounts to a pamphlet, a squib, about diplomacy, the pact "that rulers stitch together against the populace."

The play is set in Hungary in 1686, at the end of an era during which a large chunk of Hungary had for a century and a half been under occupation by the Ottoman Turks, with pro-Habsburg and pro-Turkish forces striving to reach a *modus vivendi*, in other words, to settle in for long-term survival. Weöres depicts the tragicomic situation in which new alliances are sealed (and also undone) on a daily basis, first by the Turks against the Habsburg loyalists, then by the Habsburg loyalists against the Turks, not to mention the abiding hatred of Catholics for Protestants, Christians for Jews, and those who consider themselves true-born Magyars for upstart foreigners. It is not hard to discern in this a satire, already relevant at the time the play was written, of nationalist, racist and other animosities linked with social exclusion. The key to the plot is that

there is no way of telling who is what, whose side they have taken, where they have lain low, or who is disguised as what, because the subterfuges and masquerades in which the people have engaged in the struggle for survival have made them unrecognizable. For Weöres, historicism itself is a mask, though he garbs his plot in period costumes and scenery (though, clearly, this is little more than a matter of appearances), even weaving in the city of Pécs, because the play was written to be performed by the theatre there. The characters are given dialogue couched in an opulent archaic Hungarian crammed with imagery, often irresistibly funny and always superbly comprehensible. These are fireworks of linguistic devices, poetry at its best but with a thrust. When, at the end of the play, Weöres has a soldier-turned-narrator who has gone crazy in the wars cry out, "Down with world history!", he is cancelling with a single stroke all power politics built on self-interest and camouflaged with slogans and lies, from the beginning of time to the present day. "What times, eh!" complains one of the characters, and, since time immemorial, not a minute has gone by for which his lament is not valid. A free mind, an independent spirit, a childlike temperament sticks two fingers up to a hollow, fossilized philosophy of history.

The play has been staged on a number of occasions since the eighties, but the production at the Katona József Theatre of Budapest is the first to capture its essence. The director, Gábor Máté, situates the action in the time at which it was written. This time is specific and yet abstract. The audience is meant to grasp that the message of the play does not relate simply to the Turkish, or, for that matter, to Soviet occupation which was going on at the time, so the blue uniforms and caps worn by some of the characters, with the most diverse array of garments, are very much in place. Since the act of changing costume is an underlying metaphor (turn-coating), an entire wardrobe of costumes is at hand, hanging from two rods so that the garments can be whisked back and forth across the stage: ethnic dress, the costumes of nostalgic history enthusiasts, modern-day leisure wear, and the leather jackets of the civilian police. A Turkish ruler changes into a Catholic Hungarian in an officer's uniform, and a devout worshipper of Jehovah into a Turkish Qadi. It hardly matters if one can't make out, offhand, who is who—that is precisely what the play is about. About role playing, or being *forced* to play a role. The silk cords sent by the Sultan (tacit orders to commit suicide) are handed over in red boxes with ribbons on them, rather like decorations awarded by the state.

The production handles the historical chaos that is portrayed with captivating ease. The donning and doffing of a red necktie is sufficient to indicate a figure's political allegiance; a mask is sufficient to mark the supreme manipulators—the Habsburg emperor and the Turkish sultan—when they deliver their speeches, and once the mask has been taken off we see the prototypes of the present-day civilian politician. A vintage transistor, a primitive television set, even the culture facility equipped with a stage, familiar to anyone at the time, all function as abstract space, suggesting that all the world is a stage. A space where the rehearsals of the plays by the central figure, a Calvinist scribe, are constantly interrupted by history, then swept away and banished. Comedy, put on a pedestal by Weöres's tour de force, is thus desecrated by history.

As if Weöres had prophetically foreseen the fate of the play. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Puppet Masters

Szabolcs Hajdu: *Bibliothèque Pascal*

This year's 41st Hungarian Film Week brought no surprises. Of the thirty feature films, half were enjoying their premiere screenings as part of the festival, while the other half were co-productions done with Hungarian collaboration that had already made it to the theatres. There were new films from two of Hungary's doyens of the profession: Miklós Jancsó *(So Much for Justice)* and Károly Makk *(The Way You Are)*; Márta Mészáros, following her film about Imre Nagy, the prime minister who was executed after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, again turned to a major historical figure of the recent past, Anna Kéthly, a trade unionist and prominent figure in the Social Democratic Party *(The Last Report on Anna)* from 1922 until the German occupation of Hungary in 1944 and in the years immediately following the war. The programme also included some fascinatingly unusual works, such as Andor Szilágyi's experiment with the first film shot through the camera of a mobile phone *(Life Is Ahead of Us)* or the bold experiment with film language by director and cinematographer Sándor Kardos, based on a tale by Rilke *(The Gravedigger),* which merits some comparison with French-born Chris Marker's experimental classic, *La Jetée* (*The Pier,* 1964).

The prize which surely bears the most peculiar designation—Best Genre Film—was given to journalist András B. Vágvölgyi, who was making his debut as a film director with *Colorado Kid,* a film about 1956, the eponymous protagonist of which is arrested in 1959, sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, and released in the mid-seventies to face what to him is an unknown yet brave new world. The prize for Best Director this time was split between Zsombor Dyga *(Question in Details)* and Róbert Pejó *(The Camera Murderer).* The most outstanding work of the Film Week, however, was undoubtedly Szabolcs Hajdu's *Bibliothèque Pascal,* for which András Nagy received the prize for best photography. The film won Golden Reel for Best Feature, the highest distinction of the Film Week, and the Gene Moskowitz Prize awarded by foreign film critics.

The institution bearing the high-sounding name Bibliothèque Pascal is in

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reality a flourishing high-class brothel in England (Liverpool, to be precise) which has a tradition of indulging in sexual fetishes—or at least it does in the reveries of the film's heroine, who is blessed with a rich and thriving imagination, since in Szabolcs Hajdu's new film the director revisits a world of earlier works in which dream and reality are blended with playful creativity and there is virtually no limit to the variety of ways in which they can be interpreted. Hajdu's previous full-length film, *White Palms* (2006), stood out from the short films he made while still at college and his debut feature *Sticky Matters* (2001, followed by *Tamara* in 2004) through its adoption of accepted (albeit nonlinear) narrative models, its use of generic subgroups (portraits of careers, sports films), and the interweaving of autobiographical elements. *White Palms* met with a fairly chilly critical reception in Hungary, but it was faulted not so much for any technical weaknesses as for allegedly failing to show the hand of the author, or rather failing to fit smoothly into the category that had been contrived for him on the basis of his earlier work. The recognition accorded to *Bibliothèque Pascal* can also be ascribed to Hajdu's having found his way back to the proper path. I would not gloss over the fact that Hajdu made a film between *White Palms* and *Bibliothèque Pascal,* more specifically a movie for television entitled *Off Hollywood,* which is essentially the story of the day, from dawn till dusk, of the premiere of a film by a (female) director. Not that I would call it a bad film, but I suspect I am not alone in thinking we should drop this topic for the next few decades. Too many intellectuals and too much suffering have bathed Hungary's silver screens in bitter tears over the past fifty or sixty years.

The characters in *Bibliothèque Pascal* do not suffer from any creative crisis, and they are not preoccupied with epistemological problems of existence so much as mundane problems of making ends meet. The frame story takes place in the office of a Romanian childcare official. A young woman by the name of Mona Paparu, the daughter of a mixed marriage between a Hungarian mother and Romanian father, is seeking to regain custody of her daughter Viorica, who is in the charge of the state. As part of her petition she must give an account of her family circumstances, but more importantly she must explain her reasons for having left the child in her aunt's charge (from whom Viorica was taken on the grounds of reckless endangerment of the well-being of a minor) and recount where she was and what she was doing while she was abroad. Mona tells a tale involving a fickle lover, a venture that went pear-shaped, and a one-night stand on the seashore with a lowlife who is wanted by the police for assault and battery (or is it homicide?) and claims to have inherited paranormal abilities (he is shot dead by a police squad the next day). After giving birth to her daughter, Mona makes a precarious living as a fairground performer and a puppeteer until one day her father, whom she has not seen in years, turns up and informs her that he is terminally ill, but can receive an operation in Germany if accompanied by someone who will look after him. Mona accordingly boards a train bound for the West packed with wretches and outcasts who are setting out in hopes of finding a better life, and outright crooks who forge their own luck by ripping off and exploiting the unfortunate. Of course these slaves to hope are also obliged to live as outcasts, outside the law, and it is not easy to decide who is the offender and who the victim

(many are both at the same time). Mona's father (played by Nela Razvan Vasilescu, who played the lead role in Lucian Pintilie's marvellous 1992 film *Balanta (The Oak)* sells his daughter off to people involved in human trafficking, and whether he does it for money or to save his own skin, it does not pay off. Mona finds herself in the bowels of a ship in the company of a group of other girls from Eastern Europe, and before long on an English meat market where sex slaves are bought and sold. Mona is singled out for his own use by Pascal, the owner of the brothel, who offers his élite regular clients illusions as well as sex. In an institution reminiscent of the brothel of illusions of Jean Genet's *Le Balcon,* the prostitutes are dolled up as literary characters, so that a paedophile can choose Lolita or Pinocchio, and a homosexual can find his Dorian Gray. Mona first plays the part of George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan, but as punishment for her refusal to obey, she is given the role in which it is customary to make a last appearance: that of Desdemona.

Here the story of the doomed Mona twists back to Romania and to her young daughter, whose aunt is putting her to sleep with bread dunked in spirits in order to show her dreams (for money, of course) as they are projected on screen to a gawping crowd hungry for miracles. The child dreams up an entire Balkan brass ensemble, which, marching forth from a gigantic tuba, does not stop until it reaches Liverpool's Penny Lane and releases the captives of the Bibliothèque Pascal.

Naturally the childcare official, though well-intentioned, does not believe the above tale, and even if he did he would not be able to enter it into the record, as a result of which Mona is compelled to come up with a more plausible story. It turns out to be little more than a bare-bones version of the same account, from which the fairytale touches have been dropped. Like so many other girls from Eastern Europe, in the hope of making good money she applied for 'erotic work' abroad, which turned out to be prostitution. The girls have their passports taken from them and are kept locked up. They are given drugs to get them hooked and make them easier to handle. The drugs hurt their looks and, after a while, their ability to perform, but a whore is little more than a consumer item anyway, and refuse can be thrown away and replaced with new supplies. To escape with your life is tantamount to a miracle. In *Promised Land* (2004), a film on a similar subject but done in documentary style by Israeli director Amos Gitai, the outbreak of a fire brings deliverance to a group of girls who have been smuggled into Israel from the former USSR, while the heroine in Swedish director Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-ever* (2002), another girl from the former Soviet Union, can only find escape by jumping from a bridge and committing suicide.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Hajdu has simply plucked his solution out of thin air (what dramaturges of old called a *deus ex machina,* whereas nowadays it is deemed more elegant to refer to magic realism, which can be applied to any twist that even slightly deviates from the ploddingly literal) in his efforts to resolve the conflicts of the narrative. The plot of his film is carried by a strong internal logic. There is no question of the director-screenplay writer seeking to spare either his own delicate stomach or his audience by opting not to show a grim and hopeless situation. Rather it is the heroine herself who 'confabulates', stitching together her

defeats and mistakes, the ordeals and horrors she has endured. It is even possible that Mona was able to make her escape through her daughter's help. Viorica's existence gives them both the strength to overcome all obstacles and return home. But, as the playfully ironic ending hints, this merely marks an end to the film, and not in any sense an end to their vicissitudes. This careful attention to every aspect of the work as a whole is characteristic not just of the plot. *Bibliothèque Pascal* is one of those rare Hungarian films in recent years not to betray, at more or less every turn, the hallmarks of the constraints into which co-productions are usually forced. Its multilingualism is as much a natural consequence of the narrative as the foreign locations are. The accompanying music, scenery and costumes also assume important roles in the depictions of the settings and the creation of the right atmosphere with attention lavished on the furnishings of the 'literary bordello' and its saloon, which combines modern design with the reading room of a traditional English pub, or the fetish chambers where the interiors and dress that stir the fancies of the viewers render any open portrayal of nudity superfluous.

As far as the acting goes, one ought to stress that Hajdu adopts an unusual stance as a director in choosing not to think in terms of so-called characters. Instead he writes roles for specific individuals, whether amateurs or professionals. He has made repeated use of some of his co-workers since the beginning of his career, including András Nagy, the cameraman in *White Palms* and *Off Hollywood,* who is free of any aestheticizing intention and whose sensitive camera work faithfully captures the world of the film. At first glance, it might strike one as a lost opportunity or extravagance that Orsolya Török-Illyés, an outstanding and exciting actress, is effectively only seen in her husband's films, but any loss on the roundabouts is more than won back on the swings, in the perfect fit of actress and role and the intensity of her presence. It is quite uncommon to come across such long-term and close artistic collaboration between married couples, but it is not unprecedented. One thinks of Fellini and Giulietta Masina, or the Czech couple Jan and Eva Švankmajer, as well as the Hungarian Lívia Gyarmathy and Géza Böszörményi, Béla Tarr and Ágnes Hranitzky.

Bibliothèque Pascal is a brilliantly executed and spiritually uplifting tale about people stranded on the dark side of life, who can only step into a better world in their imagination and dreams. ❧

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